

VERMEER
& THE RISE OF
THE MIDDLE CLASS
PAUL A. CANTOR

the weekly Standard

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SHOWDOWN IN ARIZONA

JOHN MCCORMACK
on Jeff Flake's uphill battle
against the Trumpification
of the GOP

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Forget It, Jake. It's Chinatown.

Whenever the vanguard of the Race'n'Gender Left™ meets the avant-garde of post-postmodern art, hilarity ensues. So it is with Omer Fast's *August*, a recent installation in Manhattan's Chinatown. If you're wondering why an art show called *August* opened in September and will close in October, trust us: The confusion doesn't end there!

Fast has arranged the front of the James Cohan gallery to resemble the waiting room of a Chinatown bus service. A dump, in other words: folding metal chairs, peeling paint, floors littered with debris, a pair of broken-down ATMs. From there, visitors move into pristine rooms outfitted to show two of Fast's videos. Because that's what he is, see—a video artist.

So why is a video artist trying to recreate a seedy storefront in Chinatown? You're not the first one to ask that question. The Chinatown Art Brigade joined with other downtown activists to condemn the show as a "hostile act." "The conception and installation of

this show reifies racist narratives of uncleanliness, otherness and blight," the brigade said in a statement.

Reifying otherness? Sounds like a job for the Trump campaign! But it



Protesters outside the exhibit

gets worse. The exhibit grinds the residents of rapidly gentrifying Chinatown into "poverty porn," the brigade said. One October Monday the activists briefly occupied the space, brandishing signs reading "#RacistGallery."

THE SCRAPBOOK greatly sympathizes with longtime Chinatown residents under assault from gentrification. They suddenly find their

beloved neighborhood becoming Brooklyn, choked by artisanal donut shops and skinny millennials carrying yoga mats. We'll take the bus waiting room any day.

But the language of the activists does seem unnecessarily harsh, and the leap from criticizing gentrifiers to shouting racism seems a bit of a stretch. No doubt Fast and the owners of the gallery are meticulously conformist in their politics, as all who are successful in the New York art world must be; indeed, a statement from the gallery to a reporter said that the show itself was "meant to raise awareness of the current threat of gentrification." Quick thinking, guys.

The brigade isn't buying it, of course. Such are the dangers faced by the post-postmodern video artist. Soon the show will close, but the scarlet letter of "racism" will remain on Fast's résumé forever. The revolution keeps a permanent record of these transgressions, and the revolution, as we've learned, eats its children. ♦

Not Very App-etizing



THE SCRAPBOOK has a smartphone, but we are sorely tempted to go back to a flip phone. Or maybe something with a dial. Smartphones were supposed to make everything easier, but we're not so sure.

Take the craze for ordering takeout food and drink products via mobile app. You still have to go, physically, to a store location to get your item—say, a grande Americano at Starbucks—but

you're led to believe it's more convenient to order and pay for your latte via mobile app. That way you just waltz through the store and pick it up. No waiting in lines!

It sounds so simple, so efficient, so modern. That is, until you actually try it. As we learned from a lovely piece in the *Wall Street Journal* recently, all sorts of problems arise. Chief among them: Customers order their items from the wrong store. Their phones assumed they wanted their items from the store nearest to them when they placed the order, but in fact they were headed to a different store—meaning they now own a grande Americano in a coffeeshop five blocks from where they happen to be. Another problem: long lines of mobile-order customers. Ordinary, non-mobile customers see

the long lines and assume the store's overcrowded; they turn away, resulting in lower overall profits for the store. Yet another problem: Mobile-order customers feel guilty about grabbing their items while others wait in line. So they wait in line anyway, defeating the whole point.

Lost revenue, purchases of faraway Americanos, guilty feelings . . . good grief. We appreciate the need to improve products and shorten delivery times, and we are committed free-marketeers. But we can't help laughing at companies that try to enhance their profits by developing smartphone-friendly purchase options that demoralize and confuse their customers. If the coffee's good, we'll wait an extra 90 seconds. We don't mind. Just don't make us download your idiotic app. ♦

ABOVE: HRAG VARTANIAN, HYPERALLERGIC; BELOW: JASON ALDEN / BLOOMBERG / GETTY

Tinseltown Transaction

Hollywood casting has been much in the news, what with the revelation that Harvey Weinstein has for decades been making the most of the old casting couch—and the fact that Weinstein is hardly the only predator demanding sexual favors for the chance at movie roles. Which made it a good time for the Casting Society of America to change the subject.

A week after the Harvey hurricane hit Hollywood, the CSA announced an “open casting call” for transgender actors at dozens of locations around the world. Welcome, according to *Deadline Hollywood*, are “trans actors, including non-binary (gender identities that are not exclusively masculine or feminine), gender non-conforming (a person whose gender behavior or appearance does not conform to social expectations), and genderqueer actors (a person who does not subscribe to conventional gender distinctions).” Got that? (There will be a test later.)

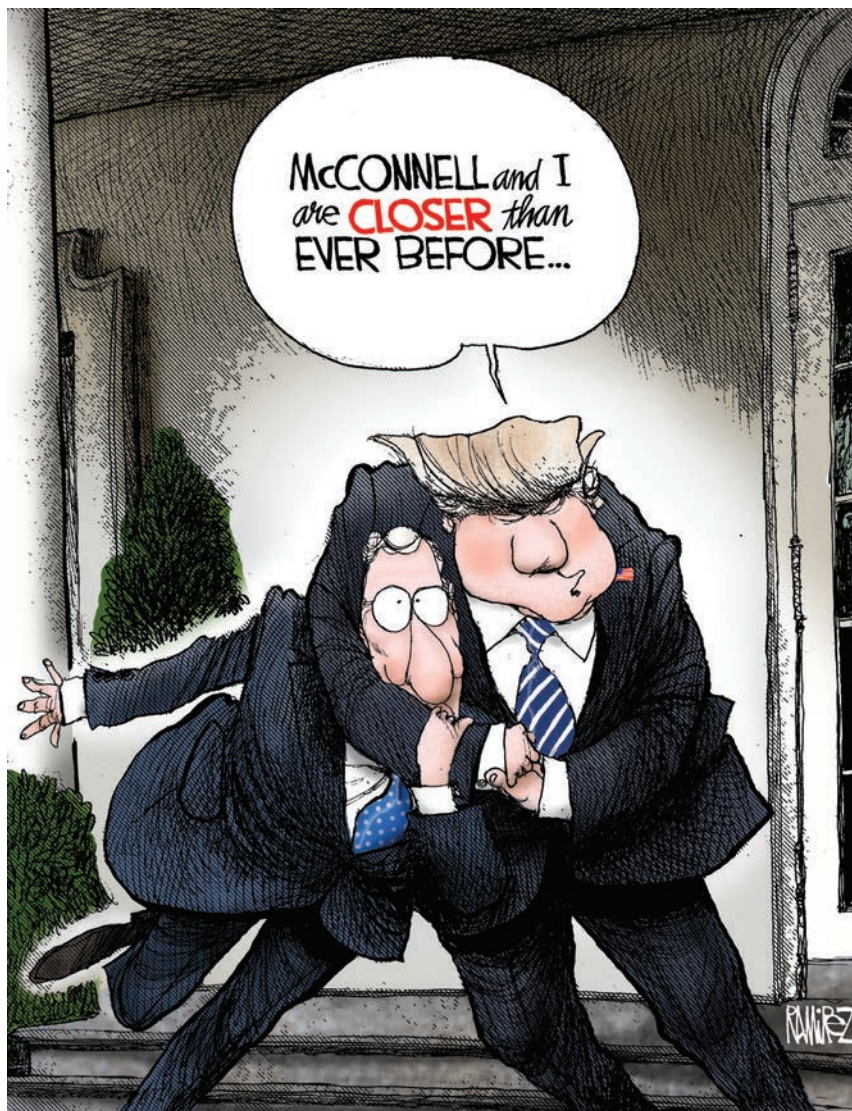
Efforts to make movies about the transgendered have run into troubles all too predictable: Cast in the lead role of the 2015 movie *The Danish Girl* was not an honest-to-goodness transgender person, but a “cisgender” actor. (“Cisgender” is the trendy term for people who “identify” with the gender on their birth certificate, thus making sure that everyone gets their own awkward gender description, even plain old men and women.) Activists have been complaining that it’s not enough to make movies with fawning portrayals of trans characters, those characters need to be played by trans actors.

Which is where the Casting Society comes in. “The reasoning a non-diverse ‘star’ gets to play a diverse role is because there weren’t enough talented, diverse options is an industry myth,” the *Los Angeles Times* reported CSA veep Russell Boast saying. “We’re going to do something about that.”

As welcome as the



The cisgender affront of
The Danish Girl



change of subject no doubt was, the CSA did find time to address that other scandal. A memo went out to

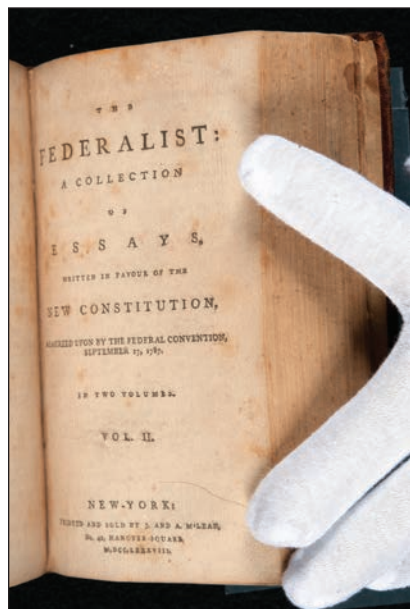
members this month declaring, “Now, more than ever, we are here to maintain and ensure the highest ethical standards when casting.” Though the memo explicitly addressed the issue of sexual harassment, it was mum on just who’s been doing the harassing. As *Deadline Hollywood* noted, “the memo never mentions Weinstein by name.” ♦

Founding Folios

Attention all history buffs and antiquarian booksellers: The School of Civic and Economic Thought and Leadership, a recently founded center at Arizona State University, is in the market for great books relevant to American political philosophy and civics. They’ve already acquired a first collected edition of *The Federalist*, which was put on display last week as a tie-in with a certain Broadway musical about one of the book’s authors. (The national tour of *Hamilton* kicks off on ASU’s campus come January.)

The school also hopes to acquire

first editions of George Washington's *Farewell Address*, Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, and a signed work by the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. It's an admirable and expensive undertaking, expected, as the *Arizona Republic* has reported, to cost half a million dollars. The four works were selected as representative of the leadership school's mission statement—which specifically praises *The Federalist* as deserving of closer study.



Hamilton, Madison, and Jay, oh my!

"We think it's inspiring to see a book from the eighteenth century, to see the original and then be able to talk about it," Paul Carrese, director of the new school, told THE SCRAPBOOK. "These historical objects had a great effect on history, we think for the good. Seeing the originals is exciting, not only for us nerdy academic types but for the wider public as well." ASU plans to take these books on the road for various events and has purchased a special travel display case.

THE SCRAPBOOK is old-fashioned enough to think musty old books are important (indeed, the older and mustier the better). They make a vital contribution to the life of the mind even behind protective glass. Students, after all, won't be dog-eared the texts themselves, but will read their own shockingly expensive paper-

back editions with greater confidence. In an age dominated by the weekly story of campus craziness, it's refreshing to see a school focus on something a university should be about. ♦

The Dystopian Present

In August, your humble SCRAPBOOK noted an alarming *New York* magazine article about how the world of teenage novels is now rife with "culture cops, monitoring their peers across multiple platforms for violations."

The bar for political correctness in young adult (YA) fiction has only gotten higher. The most recent victim of the left-wing pitchfork brigades is author Laura Moriarty, who fell afoul of the thought police even as she tried to be as progressive as progressive can be. Her new book, *American Heart*, is at the center of a nasty little kerfuffle. The book takes place in a dystopian future America. It is about a girl from Missouri who goes on a long trek to Canada to help a young Muslim girl escape being rounded up into an internment camp.

Kirkus Reviews at first gave *American Heart* a rave, calling the book a "moving portrait of an American girl discovering her society in crisis, desperate to show a disillusioned immigrant the true spirit of America."

What is there for progressives to find wrong with that? A lot, it seems.

Cue the social-media outcry that the story of a Muslim girl was told from the point of view of her "white" friend. Online torch-bearers denounced the non-Muslim author for appropriating a Muslim issue.

Kirkus cravenly retracted the review, and apologized for not calling out the book's "white savior narrative" that so offended. This even though the original positive review had been written, as *Kirkus* desperately pointed out, by "an observant Muslim person of color."

Dystopian works remain all the rage in YA fiction. In this age of online shame mobs, it's pretty clear why the theme of horrible societal breakdown is so resonant. ♦

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Blowback

The attic where I write is stifling for half of the Washington, D.C., year. But in the autumn, breezes gust through the open windows and so do the sounds of our neighborhood—children chatting on their way to school, a barking dog, the squeak of the mailbox across the street being opened, and the clang of it being closed.

Something has changed in recent years. Several times a day, a van pulls up somewhere on the street and a half-dozen Latin American men jump out. These are the leaf-blower men. A leaf-blower is basically an outsized, high-powered hairdryer. A nine-horsepower motor, suitable for an outboard on a good-sized skiff, is mounted on a backpack and attached by a plastic tube to what looks like a giant baster.

There's a sudden booming, revving sound that rises to a querulous squeal: *zheem-zheem*. The men stride onto the neighbor's lawn like Marines carrying flamethrowers to the mouth of a Saipan cave, and suddenly leaves are being blown in every direction—the soggy ones stumbling across the lawn in clumps, the dried-out ones dancing in the air.

It takes the men half an hour to nozzle them into one big disorderly pile in the street, which they push into garbage bags and drive off with. And for that half-hour, everyone within a block-wide radius is living in an agony of noise. Nothing remains of what anyone moved into the neighborhood for. No coffee on the porch for the grownups, no piano lessons for the teenagers, no rope-skipping songs for the little girls.

To take the full measure of the bizarreness of this spectacle, you must realize that our block is an urban one. No one has anything resembling what

an ordinary lawnmower-pushing American suburbanite would dignify with the name “lawn.” Our own yard would fit in a batter's box. The guy across the street has a yard the size of a squash court. In our neighborhood that passes for a latifundium.

It used to be deemed possible to clear such a space of leaves in 10 minutes, with the help of rakes. These instruments, for the benefit of Washingtonians who have never seen one, made a jingling *skring-skring* sound,



almost like a mandolin, and not so loud that a father and son couldn't have a conversation before a college football game on a Saturday afternoon. Apparently we would rather have anonymous men invade our neighborhood several times a day with deafening industrial machinery. In most cases leaf-blowing creates disruption, annoyance, and unhappiness and is *less* efficient than the homespun process it replaced.

Unpleasant, hazardous work that produces zero gains in productivity: This requires exploitable low-wage immigrants. In my neighborhood the leaf-blowing machine is like a Mexi-

can prosthesis—rare is the American citizen who has ever worn one. You can see how certain people might look out their windows muttering in bewilderment that it has been necessary to import people to help us to take this step backward. The workers seem to be the only people who benefit from leaf-blowers, aside from Hitachi, perhaps, which makes the 97-decibel Tanaka TRB24EAP. Or Husqvarna, which makes the two-cycle 125BVx, a machine that blows leaves at 170 mph and emits a noise that tops out at 98 decibels.

There is lack of commonsense in the way we use these machines. Enabling people to live as if their neighborhoods have no natural vegetation at all—is that the goal of the leaf-blower? If so, the old solution to this problem—moving to an apartment—still seems more sensible. Leaves will blow without your help. That is what leaves do. They fall off trees, the wind comes up, and they blow. You might as well have a machine to make water flow downhill.

Last week, WBZ-TV, the CBS affiliate in Boston, reported that the town of Newton had passed an ordinance prohibiting the use of gas-powered leaf-blowers from Memorial Day to Labor Day, and reducing permissible noise from 77 to 65 decibels, whatever that means. Some lady writer-of-letters-to-the-mayor had dreamed the measure up, and CBS did its very best to paint her as a shrew and a killjoy. There was a familiar lunatic-libertarian logic to the report: *Well, if you don't like leaf-blowers, then buy the houses of all your neighbors and order them to move!* More reasonable people will place the Newton leaf-blower ban just ahead of Fenway Park, chocolate frappes, and steak tips on the long list of Reasons to Move to New England. Me, I'd be satisfied if someone awarded the inventor of the leaf-blower ban the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL



Entitled Nation

Where have all the deficit hawks gone? OMB director Mick Mulvaney.

There are fewer and fewer economic principles on which Democrats and Republicans can agree, and any point of consilience will surely be forgotten as some momentary partisan need overwhelms reason and sense. Surely, however, we can all agree on a few points:

One, the U.S. government owes more than \$20 trillion to foreign and domestic investors. Two, the national debt is well beyond 100 percent of the total annual output of the American economy—a defensible state of affairs during a cataclysm on the order of the Second World War but sheer idiocy in peacetime. Three, the federal government's yearly expenditures outstrip revenues by half a trillion dollars or more—our current budget deficit is \$693 billion and climbing. Four, by far the largest contributors to our debt and deficits are the big three “entitlement” programs, Medicaid, Medicare, and Social Security. And five, there is currently no plan to do anything about any of it.

Part of the reason Washington policymakers have shown so little urgency on the subject is that it's proven so easy to avoid. Entitlements are complicated, and the details are mind-numbing. There are a lot of upward-pointing arrows, percentages, and incomprehensibly large numbers. The dangers are vast, but not immediate. They are hard to get excited about, as long as the checks are in the mail. It's also a hard problem to pin on one's ideological foes—although it's very easy, as congressional Democrats have shown many times over the years, to characterize anyone who proposes reforms to social welfare programs as an unfeeling monster. Reporters are rarely concerned about it unless (as is the case today) Republicans are pushing for tax reforms that could have an adverse impact on annual deficits.

Washington abounds in what high-minded editorialists call “serious problems,” but the unchecked growth of entitlement spending really is one: It threatens slowly to unmake the American economy and throw the republic into chaos.

At present, entitlement spending stands at about a tenth of our GDP, meaning that one out of every ten dollars an American earns goes to pay for Medicaid, Medicare, or Social Security. If present trends continue, that portion will grow to over 15 percent by 2047. The payments can't simply be reduced in budget negotiations: The federal government is legally obliged to pay set rates and amounts to current and future beneficiaries, and it can't do otherwise without changing the law. And as the government struggles to pay for these programs, the number of beneficiaries—the number of people “entitled” to benefits—grows larger and larger. Advances in medical care mean people live longer and draw more from Social Security and Medicare, and well-meaning programs like the Affordable Care Act vastly increase the number of people eligible for Medicaid. As the economy struggles to keep up, growth falters and wages stagnate. In short, we become poorer.

Entitlement growth threatens government, too. As more and more public dollars must be directed to mandatory welfare programs, the discretionary part of the federal budget will grow smaller and smaller. All those programs that liberals love—research and development for green energy, foreign aid, cultural subsidies, and on and on—will have to go. So will all those federal appropriations to the states, many of which depend on federal largesse for a third or more of their entire budgets.

ANDREW HARRER / BLOOMBERG / GETTY

Brave souls have proposed reforms. George W. Bush began his second term, for example, with a courageous but poorly executed effort to get Congress to allow taxpayers to divert some Social Security savings to private accounts. Paul Ryan considered leaving Congress after Democrats won the House of Representatives in 2006 but chose instead to return with a determination to reform entitlements. Ryan overcame the timidity and ignorance of his own party leaders and, after Republicans won back the House in 2010, used his position as House Budget Committee chairman to include major entitlement reforms in the official governing proposal of the House. Republicans voted to retool Medicaid by providing states limited block grants to fund their programs. Ryan's budget would have overhauled Medicare spending, the largest driver of our debt, by replacing the bloated, inefficient direct-payment system with premium support to insurers for plans chosen by beneficiaries. "The vote represents the most ambitious effort yet by the new Republican majority in the House to demonstrate that it intends to aggressively rein in spending and shrink government," reported the *New York Times*.

Ryan's plan had 14 cosponsors when it was introduced, and national Republicans issued stern warnings to their candidates about the perils of embracing Ryan-style entitlement reform. But once it passed, Republicans voted to support it year after year. The contrast with Democrats was clear: With the debt increasing at an exponential rate, Republicans sought to reform the programs driving it ever higher, even as Democrats, largely ignoring the growing crisis, created another entitlement.

That contrast is gone now. Congressional Republicans complain about the explosion of debt under Barack Obama and have included some past reforms in their current budget proposals. But the modest changes to Medicaid that were part of GOP attempts to reform Obamacare proved too bold for some Senate Republicans and played a key role in killing the effort. So the debate about entitlements is back to where it was a decade ago, when the debt was a mere \$8.6 trillion.

The crisis is more acute today for reasons beyond just math. The prospects for real entitlement reform are even dimmer now than they were back then. And for one basic reason: Donald Trump.

The president opposes entitlement reform. "I'm not going to cut Social Security like every other Republican, and I'm not going to cut Medicare or Medicaid," Trump told the *Daily Signal* a month before announcing his candidacy. "Every other Republican is going to cut, and even if they wouldn't, they don't know what to do because they don't know where the money is. I do."

That's . . . unclear. In that interview, Trump attributed the debt to "killers from China" who have taken American manufacturing jobs. He does not appear to have learned anything in office. Trump recently attributed the debt to multilateral trade deals and foreign aid. In early October, when *Forbes* editor Randall Lane asked him about the

unseen benefits of foreign aid, citing the Marshall Plan, Trump responded: "For me, it's America first. We've been doing that so long that we owe \$20 trillion, okay? It's America first. We have to build up our country. I got elected. It's called Make America Great Again. We have debt. We have deals going."

A few days later, Trump suggested that growth in the stock market effectively reduces the debt. "We took [the country] over and owed over \$20 trillion," he told Sean Hannity. "As you know, the last eight years, they borrowed more than it did in the whole history of our country. So they borrowed more than \$10 trillion, right? And yet, we picked up \$5.2 trillion just in the stock market. Possibly picked up the whole thing in terms of the first nine months, in terms of value. . . . And maybe in a sense we're reducing the debt."

We are nonplused. It's hard to know what to say about such nonsensical remarks. To make the most obvious point: If gains in the stock market reduced the national debt, the Obama years (235 percent growth in the S&P 500) would not have resulted in a near-doubling of U.S. debt.

The inescapable conclusion: On the most urgent domestic policy issue facing the country, President Trump has no idea what he's talking about.

There are reasons to doubt he wants to learn. In their first face-to-face meeting after Trump became the de facto Republican nominee, Paul Ryan tried to give him an adumbrated version of the entitlement-reform PowerPoint he'd given to his constituents and colleagues over the years. Trump cut Ryan off shortly after he began. The future president explained that he'd leave policy to Ryan and his colleagues while he made America great again by giving speeches and holding rallies. Trump simply wasn't interested. And even in ignorance, Trump is famously stubborn.

But the issue is too important for responsible people to just give up. Trump has shown a willingness to change his mind when advisers he respects have urged him to do so. (His recent announcement on Afghanistan is one example.)

The task falls largely to one man: Mick Mulvaney, director of the Office of Management and Budget. Mulvaney and Trump have become close over the first nine months of the administration. Trump calls Mulvaney at all hours of the day for advice on fiscal policy and much else. Mulvaney, a deficit hawk who was a member of the House Freedom Caucus from South Carolina, was a proponent of entitlement reform in Congress. He understands the problem and appreciates the need to make it a priority. The question, for Mulvaney and those who would help him, is a simple one: Do I tell the president not what he wants to hear but what he needs to hear?

If they don't—if they opt for the easy answer rather than the right one—we will look back at the end of the Trump presidency with a nostalgic fondness for the days when the debt was only \$20 trillion, when America was still an economic superpower, and when the U.S. government hadn't yet buckled under the weight of its unpaid bills. ♦

Taking the Wrong Side

‘Do we want Iran to have a nuclear weapon or not?’ asks Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) in a video making its way around the Internet. “The answer? No. So why is President Trump trying to make it easier for Iran to get a nuclear weapon?”

The remark, at once simple-minded and obnoxious, captures the thinking of many American liberals on the subject of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal. It was the Obama administration, not its critics, that made it easier for Iran to go nuclear by capitulating to the regime’s every demand in exchange for empty promises not to pursue its weapons program.

Somehow Obama convinced himself that the United States could enter into a nuclear deal with the Iranian regime that depended in part on the good faith of that same regime, even as it continued to sponsor terrorism as a matter of policy and expanded its influence through destructive and destabilizing adventurism in the Middle East. This was the famous Obama policy of “decoupling”—accepting Iran’s stated aims without regard to its actual conduct.

Obama hoped—out loud—that by treating Iran as a would-be ally instead of a proven enemy, the Iranian regime would become the friend he longed for. It was a foolish and misguided gamble.

To the surprise of no one outside of the Obama echo chamber, Tehran’s behavior hasn’t changed: It’s still attempting to acquire nuclear materials and missile technology. It’s still refusing to give international inspectors full access to its nuclear facilities. It’s still aiding Bashar al-Assad’s brutalities in Syria. It’s still openly supporting terrorism. It’s still strengthening America’s jihadist foes.

When Donald Trump entered office in January, his administration took the more ordinary approach of considering the Iranian regime not as a duality but as a whole. On October 13, he refused to certify Iran’s compliance with the agreement, and we were encouraged to think the United States would no longer make the mistake of “decoupling” a rogue regime’s words from its actions.

Just a few days later, however, on October 16, the president was asked about clashes between the Iraqi army and Kurdish militias in Kirkuk. His answer caught our attention.

In September, the Kurds held a referendum on independence from Iraq. It easily passed, with 93 percent of voters approving separation. Thus far the Kurdistan Regional Government has not asserted statehood, but independence is in the air. Since the September vote, however, Iraqi forces have entered Kurdish territories, ostensibly to reclaim territory Iraq had lost to the Islamic State in 2014 but really to reassert control of oil-rich Kirkuk and drive out or silence its Kurdish government.

Now, Trump’s answer to the question about the clashes between Kurds and Iraqis: “We’re not taking sides, but we don’t like the fact that they’re clashing.” A moment later he reemphasized: “We’ve had for many years a very good relationship with the Kurds. . . . But we’re not taking sides in the battle.”

We should. There is an excellent case to be made that the prime mover in this conflict isn’t Iraq at all. It’s Iran.

Consider: Qassem Suleimani, the Iranian general in charge of the Islamic Republic’s Quds Force, terrorist proxies that operate under Iran’s Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), was in Kirkuk to help the Iraqis plan their onslaught. So was Hadi al-Ameri, the Iraqi head of the pro-Iran Badr Organization. So was Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, head of an Iraqi military force with close ties to Iran’s Revolutionary Guard. Many of the military units described as “Iraqi” in

the media are, in fact, Iran-linked Shiite militias.

The Iranian endgame isn’t always apparent but in this instance seems clear: Tehran believes an independent, Sunni-majority Kurdistan cuts against its interest in establishing Shiite hegemony in the region. The violence perpetrated by “Iraqi” forces in Kirkuk goes far beyond Iraq’s stated plan to reoccupy oil fields and territory formerly held by ISIS: Kurds have been driven from their homes—entire neighborhoods have been cleared—and the Kurdish flag removed from government buildings.

This is Iranian meddling at its finest.

When Trump announced his new Iran policy earlier this month, he made clear that he would no longer separate the Iran deal from the nature of the regime at the center of it. He spoke of the broad threat from Iran in clear and compelling language, eschewing the moral ambiguity of his predecessor. And the policy followed the rhetoric: The administration designated the IRGC and four associated entities for their support for terror and involvement in WMD proliferation.

When President Trump says “we’re not taking sides,” he is doing just that; he is encouraging Iran to assert its malign influence and subvert a U.S. ally. We’re accustomed to seeing that sort of naïveté in the American and European media, and of course willful blindness was entrenched policy with the Obama administration. But we had just begun to hope for something better in Obama’s successor. ♦



We'll sit this one out.

Regulation: Bluster or Buster?

Trump ties red tape in knots.

BY PETER J. BOYER



Donald Trump announces his tax-reform plan in Middletown, Pennsylvania, October 11.

In a speech on October 11 promoting his tax-reform plan, Donald Trump spoke rosily of America's economic revival, crediting himself for having cleared the way for growth. "Since January of this year, we have slashed job-killing red tape all across our economy," the president said. "We have stopped or eliminated more regulations in the last eight months than any president has done during an entire term. It's not even close."

It seemed a characteristic bit of Trumpian magniloquence—he's not only a boffo deregulator, he's *the best ever!* Still, it was a remarkable claim. Trump has overseen more deregulation than George W. Bush or Ronald "government is the problem" Reagan?

But, measured by at least one significant standard, Trump's claim is true. Patrick McLaughlin of the Mercatus

Center, a free-market-oriented think tank at George Mason University, applies innovative research techniques to the study of regulation and the economy. He recently analyzed the output of regulatory restrictions promulgated in the last several presidencies, going back to Jimmy Carter. McLaughlin found that there have been periods in some presidencies when regulatory output slowed or declined—in several years of the Reagan presidency, for instance, and in 1996, when "reinventing government" was part of Bill Clinton's election pitch. But over the full terms of each recent president, including Reagan, regulation increased, according to McLaughlin. So far the increase in regulatory restrictions under Trump has been near to zero.

"So in that sense, the president may be right," the economist reports. "There may not be a net increase in regulations so far under him, and since

there was a net increase in every four-year term for every preceding president, going back to the '70s, then I think that could be a safe statement."

It's a reminder that in this distraction-a-minute presidency, it can be useful to distinguish between the person of the president, who has no discernible ideology, and his presidency, which, so far, has been strikingly conservative.

Constraining the administrative state is a founding principle of modern conservatism, which holds that economic freedom is necessary to political freedom. Trump's stated objective is prosperity, which is not unrelated, and there is much evidence (besides the intuitive) of a negative correlation between restrictive regulation and economic growth. A 2013 study published in the *Journal of Economic Growth* found that accumulated regulations between 1949 and 2005 slowed the American economy by an annual average of 2 percent. One of McLaughlin's studies estimates that the cumulative effect of government regulation caused the economy to be \$4 trillion smaller in 2012 than it might have been. "That amount equaled about a quarter of the U.S. economy in 2012, and if it were a nation's GDP, it would be the fourth largest in the world," he wrote.

After the 2016 election surprise, congressional Republicans, flush with enthusiasm over the prospect of holding both legislative houses and the presidency, determined to take on the administrative state. Industry leaders and think tanks were invited to help compile a list of particularly egregious regulations. The immediate plan was to employ a powerful but rarely successful legislative tool called the Congressional Review Act. A product of the 1996 Gingrich revolution, the act empowers Congress to override any regulation within 60 days of its promulgation. Each review roughly resembles regular legislation; it can't be filibustered, but it is subject to presidential veto, which is largely why the act has been successfully deployed only one time, early in the first term of George W. Bush.

President Trump has signed 14 such actions in 2017.

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MANDEL NGAN / AFP / GETTY

That's meaningful but mostly symbolic in the face of a regulatory regime that has added an average of 13,000 new restrictions annually for the past 20 years. "It's like pissing in the ocean," says McLaughlin.

Further-reaching reform would most effectively be made by tying explicit congressional review to every major rule created by the agencies. Such legislation exists and has for years, but invariably dies before reaching the floor of the Senate.

Trump took his own approach to the administrative state, appointing reformers to head his agencies—people like Scott Pruitt for the Environmental Protection Agency. Pruitt quickly learned how difficult it can be to halt regulatory momentum. He had tried to delay new methane-emissions rules imposed on the oil and gas industries by the Obama administration, but his effort was met by lawsuits filed by a coalition of environmental groups and sympathetic state attorneys general. A panel of federal judges in the D.C. Circuit (a court dominated by Obama appointees) ruled against Pruitt, forcing him to take his methane quest through the tortured rulemaking process.

On the other hand, Pruitt knows that there are reforms an agency chief can achieve by directive. On October 16, he announced that he would end the EPA's "sue-and-settle" approach to regulation. Also known as "friendly lawsuits," the practice saw sympathetic administrators agreeing to settle lawsuits filed by activist groups, which had the effect of shortcutting the regulatory process and shutting out public participation. Obama's EPA was an especially egregious practitioner of this approach, having created 100 new regulations through "sue-and-settle" in his first term alone.

Trump has further embraced the use of directives and executive orders in overturning Obama rules and regulations. His most potent such action was Executive Order 13771, which mandated that for every new regulation issued by an agency, two outdated or ineffective or excessively costly

regulations had to be killed. It was a clever ploy; the process of combing through old regulations is a time-consuming burden, as is the companion Trump order that the cost to the economy of any new regulation must be offset by savings from canceled regulations. Together, the effect has been to greatly delay new regulations. The government keeps track of the regulatory pace of its agencies through a semi-annual report called the Unified Agenda of Federal Regulatory and Deregulatory Actions, and one White House official who has reviewed the autumn edition says that new regulatory output is effectively nil.

That is a remarkable turn, not only from the regulation-happy Obama administration, which never met a regulation it didn't like, but also from Republican administrations of the recent past.

The day after Trump declared

himself king of deregulation, he took aim at Obamacare, issuing a directive that could eventually allow insurance companies to sell cheaper, less comprehensive products and might also allow consumers to shop for insurance across state lines. The day after that, October 13, Trump announced the decertification of the Iran nuclear deal, which could lead to new sanctions or U.S. withdrawal from the agreement.

Trump critics on the right may not be ready to declare Trump the avatar of modern conservatism, but, despite expectations and beneath the rhetorical dust storms he perpetuates, his actual governance has been strikingly conservative. It's only been nine months, and Trump may never be able to distinguish the Sharon Statement from Sharon Osbourne. But if the trend continues, Trump will doubtless find occasion to declare himself more Reaganesque than the Gipper. ♦

Trigger Warnings

Will lawmakers have a say in Iran policy?

BY JENNA LIFHITS

In mid-October, President Trump was due to make a certification to Congress on four conditions about its nuclear deal. He has repeatedly said this deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), gave the Iranians too much for too little. On October 13, he surprised no one by declining to certify one of the conditions set out in the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act (INARA), a bill Congress passed to oversee the 2015 deal: that continued sanctions relief to Iran under the agreement is "appropriate and proportionate" to measures taken by the regime to end its nuclear program.

The president said he is not yet quitting the deal, which he can do

unilaterally, but giving his administration time to fix its flaws by working with Congress and our European allies. This "decertification" set off a 60-day period during which lawmakers could reimpose the heavy sanctions killed by the 2015 deal through a fast-track process. This would immediately take the United States out of the deal—something opposed by our closest allies and some of Trump's chief advisers, including Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Secretary of Defense James Mattis.

One of the more hawkish lawmakers, Arkansas senator Tom Cotton, says he does not want to immediately reapply sanctions. He and Senate Foreign Relations Committee chairman Bob Corker of Tennessee have been working with the administration on legislation that could bolster diplomatic efforts to fix the deal. "Congress and

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the president, working together, should lay out how the deal must change and, if it doesn't, the consequences Iran will face," Cotton said ahead of the certification deadline.

The Corker-Cotton bill would essentially amend INARA, adding "trigger points" that, crossed by Iran, would lead to the reimposition of sanctions. The text of the bill has not been released, but the trigger points are certain to address specific flaws in the deal that the Trump administration has outlined. This could include inspections of Iranian military sites, the country's ballistic missile program, and the planned expiration of limits on the development of advanced centrifuges. "They're trying to rewrite U.S. policy on the deal and get it into a statutory form so that it's permanent," says David Albright, head of the Institute for Science and International Security.

The bill's restrictions would remain in force indefinitely. "These amendments under INARA would outlive the JCPOA," Secretary of State Tillerson told reporters ahead of Trump's October 13 speech. The bill could also spur broader negotiations about the deal's gaps and flaws, Tillerson said. Some European officials have suggested openness to supplementing the deal, whose negotiators included China, Russia, Germany, France, the U.K., and the EU, to address Iran's ballistic missile program as well as the agreement's expiring provisions. The Europeans have been resistant to reopening the deal itself.

Tillerson said Trump told him and others either to "put more teeth" into the deal or "forget the whole thing" and walk away. Corker told reporters that it will be up to the administration to get European allies to a "similar place," and only this will get the bill the votes it needs to pass. Without European support, he said, Democrats and even some Republicans are unlikely to sign on. "The only way this effort fails is if the administration does not work with our allies and bring them along. The onus is on the White House, and I'm going to keep the onus over there," he said. "You watch what

they do with our European allies, and then you'll know whether we're going to be successful here."

But administration officials say the bill does not require negotiations with the Europeans. It is, in the words of Tillerson, "purely an internal domestic decision." "The action we're asking Congress to take on INARA," he told reporters, "will strengthen our arguments and will strengthen our diplomatic effort if we have that kind of support, but it's not controlling the diplomatic effort itself or the pace with which we'll make progress."



A Tehran man reads a newspaper headlined 'Crazy Trump and Logical JCPOA.'

The executive and legislative branches are engaged in what one senior GOP congressional aide calls a game of "hot potato" over who is responsible for realizing the president's demands. The dispute only underscores the difficulty GOP lawmakers will have in getting the bill passed. It will need 60 votes in the Senate—meaning that if every Republican votes for it, at least eight Democrats will have to come on board. "In the Senate you need 60 senators to do anything ordinarily," the aide told me. "But right now, no Democratic senators have clearly said they want to do this sort of fix."

Trump's tough talk on the deal is fresh in Democrats' minds. "We are dealing with an administration now that does not support the agreement. Before we were dealing with an administration that did support it," says Senator Ben Cardin, the top Democrat on the Foreign Relations Committee.

"The review statute was based upon Congress being left out of the process. Now we have a president that's trying to have Congress substitute for the administration on this."

"This entire thing is contingent upon eight or nine Democrats getting on board with it," says another GOP aide. "We could be left with a situation where we're only able to get tough on Iran to the extent that the Democrats allow us to."

The Cotton-Corker bill faces serious questions from Republicans, too. "We shouldn't have the potential of the Iranians acquiring a nuclear weapon rest on Chuck Schumer's shoulders," notes Wyoming representative Liz Cheney. She describes the Corker-Cotton proposal as "wholly insufficient" because it leaves the nuclear deal in place. "It's one thing for Obama to have negotiated the worst deal that the United States has ever entered into," Cheney says. "It's another thing if you then have the Republican Congress look like we are somehow giving our blessing to that deal."

Florida senator Marco Rubio and Texas senator Ted Cruz say that they see reimposing sanctions as the best step. "The Obama Iran deal was spectacularly dangerous when signed, and it remains so," Cruz told reporters.

The president has options outside of the Corker-Cotton legislation. He could detail the "trigger points" through executive orders without the hassle of congressional approval. "The administration could, and probably should, issue a new executive order that, at least for the duration of Trump's term, lays out these trigger points, and then use diplomacy and pressure to persuade other countries to get on board," the senior GOP aide points out.

But some lawmakers say that they are happy to have a voice in Iran policy, describing it as a welcome change from the Obama administration's unilateralism. "Instead of us just being critics sitting on the sidelines, get us involved," said South Carolina senator Lindsey Graham, a proponent of the "trigger point" proposal. "I think challenging the Congress is a good thing." ♦

STR / AFP / GETTY

Politicians General

A fight in Virginia over the proper role of an AG.

BY FRED BARNES

Mark Herring, Virginia's attorney general, wanted to run for governor this fall. But Terry McAuliffe, the current governor, thought otherwise. And his endorsement of lieutenant governor Ralph Northam for the Democratic nomination for governor sent a blunt message to Herring: forget it.

Crestfallen but obedient, Herring has. He's running for reelection. But he acts like a gubernatorial candidate, sounds like one, and may be one four years from now. When he was elected in 2013, he promised to get politics out of the attorney general's office. He's failed at that, mainly for lack of trying.

In a debate in June with his Republican opponent John Adams, Herring, 56, described himself this way: "When I see a problem, I want to fix it. When I see a wrong, I want to set it right. . . . Problems need to be fixed."

Herring isn't waiting for them to reach his desk in Richmond. In January, when President Trump's temporary travel ban kept some passengers from several "Muslim-majority" countries from entering America, Herring rushed to Dulles airport to join McAuliffe at a press conference denouncing Trump.

In a sense, Herring has things backwards. Over the past four years, McAuliffe accomplished little as governor. He was stymied by the house of delegates, which is controlled by Republicans and led by McAuliffe's nemesis, speaker William Howell. But Herring did plenty, acting more like a liberal politician than an attorney general.

In fact, Herring has played a more significant role than the governor. This is not surprising. The emergence

of state AGs as major figures is in full swing, led mostly by Republicans who challenged President Obama's policies on federalism grounds. Democrats like Herring are trying to copy them on whatever issues they can find.

As a state senator, Herring voted for an amendment defining marriage as between a man and a woman, but as AG he refused to defend the



John Adams, left, and Mark Herring

law in federal court. Nor did he defend Virginia's voter ID law or state regulations on abortion clinics. He also backed in-state college tuition for illegal immigrants and killed reciprocity for those with concealed carry gun permits from other states.

All this political activity created the issue on which Adams has based his campaign. He has vowed to be a nonpolitical AG, doing what Herring promised but didn't. "The way to get politics out of the AG's office is to get the politicians out of the attorney general's office," he said in the debate.

Adams is an impressive candidate, especially for someone who's never run before. He's a strong debater and a genial campaigner. Herring has led in polls from the beginning, but the margin has slipped to mid-to-low single digits in the weeks before the November 7 election.

A relative of President John Adams, he's from Chesterfield County, a Richmond suburb. Herring is from northern Virginia. Adams was a Supreme

Court law clerk for Clarence Thomas, a federal prosecutor, and an associate counsel in President George W. Bush's White House. Prior to running, he worked for the McGuire Wood law firm in Richmond.

It was Herring's "picking and choosing" which state actions to defend and his forays into politics that prompted Adams to run. He cleared the Republican field of primary challengers, notably state senator Mark Obenshain, whom Herring defeated in 2013 by 165 votes out of 2.2 million cast.

Herring says he wants to be "attorney general for all Virginians," which sounds more like a justification for indulging in politics than a job description. Adams is quite specific. As AG, he wouldn't be the lawyer "for the Republican caucus" in the general assembly, as Herring claims. And "no one will refer to me as the lawyer for the governor. . . . The governor has his own lawyer. The attorney general is the lawyer of the Commonwealth of Virginia." That means defending state laws and actions and advising the legislature if it wanders in unconstitutional directions.

Herring has largely declined to defend what Adams calls the "extreme politicization" by Herring of his office. Instead, he's concentrated on attacking Adams's career as a private attorney. In the debate and in TV ads, he attacks Adams as a shill for Wall Street and big corporations.

"John Adams is the best attorney general the powerful and well-connected can buy," the Herring ads claim. In this and other ads, he seems to have drawn heavily from the Democratic playbook for running for any political office.

The contrast with Adams's spots is striking. "If you're ready to get the politics out of the attorney general's office, join me," Adams says. He uses a cutout of President Adams in one ad and says grinningly, "I may be related to this guy, but this is my first campaign."

The June debate was civil. So were visits by Herring and Adams to speak at the Center for Politics at the University of Virginia recently. "They are quiet, even a bit shy, and not at

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ADAMS: SARA D. DAVIS / GETTY; HERRING: JAY PAUL / GETTY

all pompous,” said Professor Larry Sabato. The separate meetings “ran overtime because everyone was enjoying the conversation. That doesn’t happen too often.” After the blitz of TV ads, it’s not likely to happen again.

Where’s McAuliffe in all this? He’s bent on running for president in 2020, and he’d like a Democratic governor in Virginia to buttress his campaign. We’ll know soon if he made the right choice. ♦

Predator’s Ball

What? A lecherous producer? Who knew?

BY PHILIP TERZIAN

My guess is that up until two weeks ago, the name of Harvey Weinstein meant little if anything to most people, including readers of this magazine.

My own knowledge was rudimentary, at best. As a consumer of newspapers and lifelong insomniac with a television set, I was aware that he was a very successful and well-publicized “independent” film producer, particularly adept at campaigning for, and winning, Oscar nominations and trophies. But as my long-suffering wife can attest, contemporary cinema is not a passion of mine, and the list of Harvey Weinstein movies I have failed to see (*Pulp Fiction*, *Shakespeare in Love*, *The Crying Game*, *Good Will Hunting*, *The Lord of the Rings*, etc.) is considerably longer than the single Weinstein film (*The English Patient*) I am confident I once saw—well, most of it, anyway—on cable.

It didn’t help that Weinstein was almost as well known for his (predictably left-wing) political activism and generous financial support for Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, John Kerry, and other Democratic luminaries, or that he seemed to be a ubiquitous presence at the various show-business rituals—awards ceremonies, late-night talk shows—I tend to avoid. Since he was usually described in the media with the

customary euphemisms reserved for bullying and obnoxiousness (“brash,” “persistent,” “outspoken”), I assumed Weinstein’s outward appearance—slovenly, habitually unshaven, corpulent—reflected an inner self I could only imagine.



Ben Affleck, Harvey Weinstein, and Matt Damon in New York City, October 7, 2016

Still, I was surprised, if not necessarily shocked, by details of his sexual aggressiveness and compulsive boorishness in the *New York Times* and *New Yorker* exposés. Surprised, that is, in the way that I am always surprised when mayors are indicted for bribery schemes: How could they have failed to guess, when pocketing the money, that someone would talk? It is now an article of faith that Everybody Knew, for years if not decades, about Harvey Weinstein’s repellent habits and practices. But of course not “everybody” pays attention to the world he inhabits or much cares about it; and like most people, I am well down the list

of the well-informed when it comes to celebrity gossip.

I say this not as an excuse after the fact, or for absolution, but to emphasize that the entertainment world—like sports, politics, science, journalism, high finance, academia, Silicon Valley—is a self-contained realm, a bubble in current parlance, that tends to exaggerate its own significance. But it does explain to some degree why Harvey Weinstein has since been transmuted into all movie moguls, or all males wielding power, or all men. We tend to see, in this lurid instance, what we want to see.

To be sure, even by show-business standards, Weinstein’s long history of sexual predation and assault seems to have been exceptional. But was it? The casting couch is an age-old concept in the theater, and the lecherous producer has been a stock character since the invention of film. And just as

the private lives of public figures tend to be mysterious, we conceal or reveal their truth for innumerable reasons. This has tragic, and sometimes comic, consequences.

In “Champion,” the 1916 story by Ring Lardner, for example, the cruel malevolence of a popular boxer is protected because, as an editor explains, “it wouldn’t get us anything but abuse to print it. The people don’t want to see him knocked. He’s champion.” In James Thurber’s “The Greatest Man in the World” (1931), a young aviator who has flown non-stop around the globe is found not to be a self-effacing youth who loves his mother—in fact, they detest one another—but a profane delinquent and petty criminal interested only in the money and fame. The ostensible hero is called to an emergency meeting of prominent citizens, including the president of the United States, in a hotel room, where he is ultimately shoved out the window to spare the public from disillusion.

In that sense, the Harvey Weinstein saga is surprising not because he behaved as he did—human nature has not changed much in history, and

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MIREYA ACIERTO / WIREIMAGE / GETTY

cruelty often pays off—but because the people around him, whether friends, business partners, admirers, beneficiaries, even victims, largely conspired to share his secrets for a very long time but not broadcast them outside the bubble. The reactions of the actresses and studio employees who were subject to his gross, sometimes violent, assaults are understandable: Who among us has not failed to stand up against wrongdoing or used silence as a self-preservative? Yet the great and good among us, who must surely have heard the Weinstein rumors and anecdotes, have much to explain.

The fact that there is an explicit political angle to this episode—Weinstein seems to have subsisted and prospered almost exclusively among liberals—is reflected with particular tone-deafness in his memorable statement in response to the *Times* story, in which he sought to deflect attention from the subject at hand to his disdain for Donald Trump and the National Rifle Association. This has given conservatives, myself included, some reason to gloat. But of course, hypocrisy knows no partisan bounds. The revelations about Roger Ailes and Bill O'Reilly at Fox News are not forgotten, and in the midst of the Weinstein explosion, a pro-life congressman was compelled to resign his seat because he had advised his mistress to get an abortion. To the stereotype of the sinning clergyman may now be added the filmmaker-sexual predator honored for his feminist opinions.

Which is why, even amid Harvey Weinstein's disgrace and ignominy, I am not persuaded that much will change. Presumably, Weinstein's professional life is over—it seems already to have subsided, which may explain the timing—and he might find himself in legal jeopardy. But while certain details of his fall from grace are more farcical than serious—expulsion from the ludicrous Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, cancellation of the Weinstein Books imprint at the Hachette Group—and numerous small fry are likely to lose their jobs, the culture that nourished

him will surely adapt, to some degree, but won't mutate.

In Hollywood, or anywhere for that matter, all the instincts and human reflexes, all the ingredients of reward and ambition, that made him

possible remain intact. Passions will cool, another earthquake will occur, a movie version will be made—and Harvey Weinstein, like Bill Cosby or Anthony Weiner, will dissolve into the twilight. ♦

Iran-Iraq War on the Kurds

Washington abandons an ally.

BY KELLY JANE TORRANCE

Iraqi prime minister Haider Al-Abadi took to Twitter on October 13 to dispute rumors that his forces were mobilizing to take over areas under the control of Iraqi Kurds, particularly the oil-rich city of Kirkuk. “The fake news being spread has a deplorable agenda behind it,” he wrote. As with most deployments of the term, “fake news” meant “news I don’t like.” Just three days later, Iraqi and allied militias took Kirkuk by force. There were casualties on both sides, though it’s not clear how many; almost immediately, some 100,000 civilians fled. U.S. Central Command was just as disingenuous as the Iraqi leader: “We believe the engagement this morning was a misunderstanding and not deliberate as two elements attempted to link up under limited visibility conditions,” it said in a statement.

“Who is responsible for what happened?” one civilian who left asked a CNN reporter in despair. He wasn’t the only person wondering how one ostensible U.S. ally could get away with attacking another. The Kurds have been the paramount partners in the U.S. battle against the Islamic State. Iraqi military were accompanied by paramilitary fighters, and it became clear that the United States knew about the operation ahead of time.

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When asked if America had given the go-ahead, State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert said simply, “We have long called for a unified, democratic Iraq.”

Against the Kurds, Iraqi troops used military equipment the United States had provided to them for the purpose of vanquishing the Islamic State. But there was more to the taking of Kirkuk than that. The civilian’s question can be best answered by looking at the most notable figures present when the Kurdish flag was removed from Kirkuk’s provincial council building and the Iraqi flag was raised in its place: Counter Terrorism Service commander Abdul Ghani al-Asadi, Badr Organization president Hadi al-Ameri, and Popular Mobilization Forces commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis. The CTS is an elite Iraqi military unit trained by the United States. Badr and PMF (also known as Hashd al-Shaabi) are Iraqi militias with direct ties to Iran and its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

Tensions have been high between the Kurds and the Iraqi government since the former voted overwhelmingly in a September 25 referendum to seek independence. But it wasn’t until President Donald Trump announced the decertification of the Iran nuclear deal and increased sanctions on the IRGC in a speech Friday, October 13, that the real power

behind the Baghdad government took decisive action. That weekend, Qassem Suleimani, leader of the IRGC's foreign arm the Quds Force, met with representatives of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, one of the two main Kurdish factions, in Kirkuk and Sulaymaniyah. Through a combination of persuasion (cash) and threats (of force), he reportedly secured an agreement that their forces would stand down when the militias entered Kirkuk on Monday. It was the elements of the Kurdish military loyal to the Kurdistan Democratic party, a PUK rival, who offered the only resistance. (The PUK has demanded that Iraq shut down the Rudaw Media Network after it reported that militia members beheaded some of the Kurdish fighters.)

The Iranian regime, for once, kept its word and rather quickly. A foreign ministry spokesman warned days before Trump's speech that if the president declared the IRGC a terrorist organization, "Iran's reaction would be firm, decisive, and crushing." It took mere hours after Trump's announcement for the IRGC's Suleimani to arrange a blow to a U.S. ally. He had plenty of resources to draw on in Iraq, where Iranian influence has steadily grown over the last few years. Badr was created in Iran, and Iraqi exiles fought under its auspices for the Islamic Republic in the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s. Muhandis, the PMF commander on hand in Kirkuk, is a close adviser to Suleimani and himself a U.S. Treasury-designated terrorist.

The only thing more incredible than the fact IRGC-backed militias used U.S. weapons to attack a U.S. ally is that the Trump administration has accepted the situation. In his speech on Iran, President Trump declared, "Our policy is based on a clear-eyed assessment of the Iranian dictatorship, its sponsorship of terrorism, and its continuing aggression in the Middle East and all around the world." But he seems unconcerned that the regime responded to that denunciation with force. "We're not taking sides," President Trump said when asked about Kirkuk—though

allowing Iranian-directed militias to take the Kurdish city of a million is, of course, choosing a side. Fox News actually spun "Iraq reclaims Kirkuk" as one of Trump's "major victories" in the Middle East, which the president approvingly shared on Twitter. One of the president's top spokesmen sounded positively Obamian in discussing the debacle. "We remain very concerned about the situation in northern Iraq," National Security Council spokesman Michael Anton



An Iraqi federal forces member holds the Kurdish flag upside down in Kirkuk, October 16.

told NBC News. "We urge both parties to stand down and resolve any dispute peacefully and politically, remain united in the fight against ISIS and remain united against a common threat in Iran."

Those last few words are laughable—the Iraqi military has been working with Iranian-backed militias for years. But the mention of ISIS highlights another, very serious consequence of America's abandonment of the Kurds. Back when Suleimani was directing Shia combatants to kill hundreds of American troops in Iraq, the Kurds were helping the United States fight terrorists. They captured al Qaeda member Hassan Ghul on his way from Iraq to Iran and handed him over to the American military. He divulged the identity of Osama bin Laden's messenger, information that eventually led to the al Qaeda leader's death.

It was the Kurds' brave and determined stand against the Islamic State that led to their control of Kirkuk, which has about 10 percent of Iraq's known oil reserves. In the late 1950s,

Arabs made up less than a quarter of the city, but Saddam Hussein instituted an "Arabization" program, forcibly relocating Kurds, Turkmen, and Assyrians and installing Arabs in their place. But the Iraqi military stripped off their uniforms and fled the city ignominiously in 2014 when the Islamic State began seizing areas nearby. The Kurds stayed and fought, eventually retaking the city from the jihadists. They've held it ever since. Over a million Christian, Yazidi, and Arab refugees have found asylum in that area and others controlled by the Kurds since the murderous Islamic State began killing, torturing, and raping them. More than 1,700 Kurdish fighters have died fighting ISIS alongside the United States.

As soon as Iraqi and Iranian-backed militias focused their U.S.-provided military equipment on the Kurds in Kirkuk and other areas, the Islamic State took advantage. After the Kurdish peshmerga withdrew in nearby Dibis, dozens—possibly hundreds—of ISIS jihadists escaped from detention. The terrorist group launched attacks on a number of villages near Kirkuk, capturing three of them. Coalition forces—including Americans and Kurds—might have just retaken ISIS's de facto capital of Raqqa in Syria after a long battle, but the jihadist group is by no means destroyed.

Meanwhile, another sworn enemy of the United States increases its grip on the region—with the aid of America itself. It's not just the weapons, equipment, and training the United States gives the Iraqis, which are now being used against not ISIS but America's best ally in the fight against ISIS. More money has been flowing into Iranian regime coffers since the nuclear deal secured the Islamic Republic sanctions relief and the ability to attract more foreign investment. A U.S. general has estimated that Iran funds its militias in Iraq to the tune of \$750,000 to \$3 million a month. The United States insists Iraq must remain a unified country. But what if it becomes unified under the sway of a terrorist regime whose leaders regularly chant "Death to America"? ♦

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A Blue State's Red Leader

Being the Republican governor of Massachusetts is like being a hockey goalie. **BY CHRIS DEATON**



Charlie Baker, center, at a parade in Boston's Dorchester neighborhood, August 26

It's common for Bostonians to give their politicians a 59 percent approval rating—just not Republican ones. Charlie Baker, the third-year Massachusetts governor, is the exception. More than two thirds of the state's voters give him high marks in surveys, which is itself a polling phenomenon. But Beantown skews much further left than the commonwealth's general electorate: There are eight registered Democrats for every Republican here, while statewide it's three-to-one. Yet “Bakah,” as the locals pronounce the name, is among the city's most popular politicians.

It'd be easy to credit bipartisanship for his good standing. Working across the aisle is a necessity as much as a virtue for Republicans in the Bay State, and Baker, 60, is naturally suited to

it. He worked as a cabinet secretary under Governor William Weld (1991-97), another beloved, deal-cutting Massachusetts Republican. In 1998 Baker left state government for the health care sector and the next year became CEO of Harvard Pilgrim Health Care, where he showed a data-driven, customer-oriented leadership style that has translated well to non-partisan governing.

But there's no underestimating the benefits of his personal style, which is punctilious in private and affable in public. “It's not uncommon for him to sit with a PowerPoint presentation and ask about a footnote,” one Massachusetts official recalls of working with Baker. People who work for him describe him as a willing listener. He meets weekly with a group of Democratic leaders in the statehouse, including senate president Stan Rosenberg and house speaker Robert DeLeo. Baker isn't shy about touting

such relationships—he, Rosenberg, and DeLeo led a panel at the National Conference of State Legislatures summit in August entitled “From Politics to Statesmanship: Solving Problems in a Partisan World.” It was moderated by Weld.

“It's a lot harder to take a cheap shot at someone in the press if you know you're going to be sitting across the table from them sometime in the next seven days,” the former governor says.

The cordiality has its perks. A priority when Baker took office in 2015 was reform of Boston's public transit system after a record-breaking winter with nine feet of snow exposed its poor management and operations. One of his most controversial ideas was to exempt the T, as it is known, from a state law protecting public workers from competing with private contractors for jobs. Organized labor protested, and the senate left the provision out of its budget draft. But Baker pressed the case on state lawmakers and union workers, insisting that his goal was to “fix the T,” not “privatize the T.” DeLeo bought in, telling the *Boston Herald* that the urgency of T reform required taking “some steps that are a little bit stronger than you normally would.”

A three-year exemption from the law was negotiated—a compromise for which Baker complimented Democrats. “I think to some extent, the legislature, to their credit, made a decision that they wanted to test this,” he said. Just 6 of the state's 160 Democratic legislators voted against the budget containing this and other T reforms Baker requested.

Baker's diplomatic approach to governing has earned him plaudits from across the aisle. In April, Boston mayor Marty Walsh, Baker's partner in luring GE's headquarters to Boston, said he wouldn't rule out supporting the Republican when he runs for reelection next year. Former lieutenant governor Tom O'Neill, the son of Tip and a Massachusetts Democratic heavyweight himself, is equally complimentary.

“Has Charlie Baker as governor

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JOHN TLUMACKI / BOSTON GLOBE / GETTY

of the state done a good job to this point in time? Yes, he has,” O’Neill tells me. “Does that mean that he is untouchable going forward? You know, it’s a strange business, politics. Anything can happen.” O’Neill mentions the “uncertainty” Baker will face from the Trump administration’s actions on health care, which claims 40 percent of the state’s budget, and tax reform, which could hurt Republicans in blue states.

For all of Baker’s crossover appeal, he retains conservative credibility on fiscal policy. Massachusetts lawmakers have approved budgets based on rosy revenue projections that have fallen short each year of Baker’s governorship. In turn, he’s revised tax expectations downward and vetoed almost \$750 million of spending—90 percent of which Democrats have overridden. This year he struck \$222 million in health spending and more than \$40 million in earmarks from the state budget. “Being the Republican governor of Massachusetts is sort of like

being a hockey goalie,” says Ryan Williams, who was a spokesman for Mitt Romney when he was governor.

Baker tacks right on top-line education issues, too. He supported a failed ballot initiative to lift the state’s cap on charter schools last November. He testified before Massachusetts’s education board against the adoption of Common Core standards in 2010, and he remains opposed to adhering to them now. He did not, however, take a position last year on a conservative proposal to repeal them. Baker, fearing disruption in the commonwealth’s schools, sought the middle ground, arguing for state-specific standards that incorporate appropriate Common Core elements. His goal was to regain the state’s autonomy without upending its teachers. “We’re not going to be the caboose to the train of a federal program,” Baker told *Commonwealth* magazine.

At a time when President Trump has suffused every crevasse of American society, it’s inevitable that

reporters will seek comment from prominent Republicans, even the ones who don’t work in Washington. But Baker steers clear of the third rails of national politics. He has denounced federal policies that could affect Massachusetts, notably Washington’s wild piñata swings at reforming Obamacare, and he has expressed disappointment with the withdrawal from the Paris climate accord and the proposed travel ban. But while Baker is a Trump skeptic—he was an early opponent of his candidacy and has said he didn’t cast a ballot for him or Hillary Clinton—he is not on the front lines of any “resistance” or intraparty rebellion.

What’s perhaps most symbolic is that Baker works in a plain workspace down the hall from the traditional ornate governor’s office, which he said he forwent in favor of somewhere he “can spill a cup of coffee and not worry about it.” There’s no room for sugar or cream in Charlie Baker’s no-frills governorship. ♦

Beyond Silicon Valley: Tech’s Best Hubs

THOMAS J. DONOHUE
PRESIDENT AND CEO
U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

By now everyone is aware that we are in the midst of a digital revolution. Innovative technology startups are changing everything from the way we monitor our health to the way our children learn to the way we power our cars, homes, and lives. This revolution is transforming our entire economy, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce is working to ensure that every city and town across America enjoys the benefits the digital economy has to offer.

In pursuit of this goal, we partnered with D.C.-based startup incubator network 1776 to release the third edition of our *Innovation That Matters* report, which examines the health of the startup communities in 25 American cities and assesses their readiness to capitalize on the shift to a more digital economy. In this study, we placed a unique emphasis on what

we refer to as “next-wave startups,” or those that are developing the next big breakthroughs in complex industries such as health, energy, and education.

Topping the list of the most innovation-friendly cities are Boston, the Bay Area, Philadelphia, San Diego, and Austin. These cities foster innovative cultures and embrace cutting-edge technologies, and in return, they reap the rewards of economic vibrancy and an improved quality of life. We also saw several cities in the top 10 improve dramatically since our *Innovation That Matters* report in 2016. Atlanta jumped 15 spots to No. 6, and Dallas moved 12 places to No 7.

All 25 cities included in the rankings have well-established and growing startup communities, which means they are already good examples of how to attract and benefit from innovative new companies. Now, the Chamber Technology Engagement Center, or C_TEC, is working to spread the word about

these successes around the country so that other cities can create connections, foster collaboration between local stakeholders, and avoid missing out on the extraordinary benefits of our new economy.

C_TEC pursues public policy solutions for the challenges companies and cities face. It brings together leaders from government and business to explore new ideas, including through events like TecNation—a conference it hosted last week. *Innovation That Matters* offers insights into the important issues facing tech and America. It will help civic leaders discover what works, where their cities’ efforts are falling short, and how they can create stronger ecosystems that benefit startups, institutions, government, and citizens.

To learn more and read the full report, visit uschamber.com/ITM.



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Let's Hear It for the Red Cross

There's a disconnect between the criticism it receives and the scale of its work. **BY GRANT WISHARD**



Volunteers in Houston receive instructions at a Red Cross shelter for victims of Hurricane Harvey, August 28.

The American Red Cross was founded in 1881 by Civil War nurse Clara Barton. It was the first U.S. relief organization and established its effectiveness with responses to the Great Thumb Fire of 1881 and the Johnstown Flood in 1889. In the 20th century, the Red Cross became a byword for humanitarianism and good works. In the 21st, the organization can seemingly do nothing right.

The troubles began 16 years ago, in the aftermath of 9/11. The Red Cross came under fire for mishandling blood and money donated to the victims and their families. After Ground Zero was declared a crime scene, the Red Cross found itself on the sidelines with little responsibility and too much money. When it came to light that the Red Cross had repurposed \$200 million from its so-called 9/11 Liberty Fund,

the public was outraged. Since then, hurricanes Katrina (2005), Isaac (2012), and Sandy (2012) have each brought new scandal for the charity. Emergency vehicles diverted for PR stunts, rumors of sex offenders mistakenly allowed to mingle with children, and ill-equipped emergency shelters have all been the source of bad press. When a 2015 ProPublica investigation revealed that the Red Cross had raised half a billion dollars to aid Haiti after the devastating 2010 earthquake but built only six permanent houses in the country, it was the last straw for many critics.

The American Red Cross is no longer given the benefit of the doubt. On August 30, just five days after Harvey made landfall in Texas, the *New York Times* suggested donors should send their money to other charities, criticizing the organization's emphasis on public relations and a lack of accountability for the vast sums it raises. The rest of the media quickly

chimed in, and there were calls for a boycott on social media. A Houston city councilman, Dave Martin, made headlines after begging his constituents not to donate to the "Red Loss." "Don't waste your time, don't waste your money," he said at a public meeting. Houston mayor Sylvester Turner was equally unimpressed. "If you promise people something, you got to make it happen because—otherwise—don't promise at all," he said, referring to the Red Cross's delay in getting financial aid to city residents. Many displaced Houstonians were eligible to receive an immediate \$400 for food and clothing from the Red Cross, but the grant website crashed the week after the flooding—ironically, due to high traffic. Much of the criticism centered around the fact that the donations website functioned without issue.

While criticism of the charity is at an all-time high, donations remain seemingly unaffected. To date, the Red Cross has raised \$350 million for victims of Hurricane Harvey, \$45 million for victims of Irma, and \$9 million for victims of Maria. The organization's chief public affairs officer, Suzy DeFrancis, says that the charity has seen no loss in support in recent years and characterizes the public's response to the 2017 hurricane season as "overwhelming" and "generous." The victims of Hurricane Maria, which struck Puerto Rico particularly hard on September 20, have drawn much less popular support than those of Harvey or Irma. Yet Puerto Rico has received the full Red Cross response—basic material aid, a system to reconnect separated families, and even disaster mental-health outreach teams to help survivors recover from shock.

The Red Cross is fundamentally different from the other well-established charities it is often grouped with, like Samaritan's Purse or the Salvation Army. In 1905, Congress designated the organization responsible for "a system of national and international relief in time of peace" and to "apply the same in mitigating the sufferings caused by pestilence, famine, fire, floods, and other great national calamities, and to devise and carry on

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ERICH SCHLEGEL / GETTY

measures for preventing the same.” The Red Cross is burdened with an enormous task—to prepare for and respond to disasters everywhere.

Despite the congressional mandate, the organization receives only a small amount of federal money, just 2-3 percent of its annual budget on average. It relies on donor support to fund its many missions and keep it in a state of preparedness. Since 1943, the president has annually called upon the American public to support the Red Cross through the donation of blood, volunteer time, and money. In proclaiming March “Red Cross Month,” President Trump noted that in 2016 Red Cross “volunteers responded to 180 significant incidents, including wildfires, storms, flooding, Hurricane Matthew, and other emergencies at all times of the day and night.”

After any disaster, the Red Cross plays a key role in coordinating the efforts of smaller charities with state and local government. “Its function is not to look after Mrs. So-and-so whose

house has flooded,” explains Leslie Lenkowsky, former CEO of the Corporation for National and Community Service in 1993, the federal agency focused on service programs, “but the Red Cross will create the framework which those other groups of first responders are working in.” When the Cajun Navy rescues an elderly couple from their flooded home, their next stop is most likely a Red Cross shelter. When it’s time to start rebuilding homes, Habitat for Humanity’s partner will likely be the Red Cross.

According to Suzy DeFrancis, in the month after Hurricane Harvey hit Texas, the Red Cross organized 413,000 overnight stays in emergency shelters, 3.1 million meals and snacks, and 6,000 disaster workers from across the country. But even these numbers fail to convey the scope of the Red Cross’s cooperation with other organizations. Beth Gazley, a professor at the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy at Indiana University, says the mega-charity “gives us a lot of information

about what they do as one agency, but there’s no metrics given about the number of agencies they’ve collaborated with that really helps us understand how disaster relief gets done.”

Meals on Wheels, a national organization that delivers meals to senior citizens who are unable to leave home, partnered with the Red Cross in southern Florida in the aftermath of Irma. Though the storm was less destructive to the state than originally feared, Meals on Wheels exhausted its food supply and budget within 24 hours. Local executive director Mark Adler said he received a phone call from the Red Cross asking if Meals on Wheels volunteers were available to distribute more supplies. “They were very responsive, quick. We had a few more phone calls and the meals were there within 48 hours,” says Adler. His people were able to distribute an additional 24,000 meals thanks to the Red Cross.

Adler is unimpressed by the criticisms of the Red Cross: “I think they’re the backbone of disaster relief,

**IN THE LAST CENTURY, IRON AND STEEL
MADE NATIONS STRONG.**



especially for nonprofits that are working on a limited budget.” Adler had told the Red Cross that Meals on Wheels could handle “about 10” pallets of packaged meals; 22 arrived. The flood supplies trickled down to smaller groups such as United Cerebral Palsy and the Center for Independent Living, which passed them even further along to local food pantries and neighborhood housing authorities. “It was really this effective and efficient organic network that grew in hours to serve all of these people. One agency could never do all that alone,” explains Adler.

Much of the criticism leveled at the Red Cross says less about its competence than about how the media covers disasters. There’s a disconnect between the low-level criticism the organization receives (“Red Cross delivers flashlights without batteries”) and the scale of the charity’s work. Negative headlines appear during major disasters, but the Red Cross is working year-round in all 50 states, almost entirely without incident.

The charity is currently responding to wildfires in multiple states. And if you want to send money to victims in, say, Montana, the Red Cross is the only recognizable charity available. In response to the Las Vegas shooting, the Red Cross moved 450 units of blood to local hospitals and set up an assistance center for the victim’s families.

The Red Cross frequently claims to respond to “64,000 disasters every year.” In an average year, it responds to a house fire every eight minutes—it won’t be a surprise to learn the organization installed 353,000 smoke alarms in 2016. It taught 5.3 million people CPR and other “lifesaving skills” in 2016. Most of what the charity does is never criticized, never praised, never noticed.

The Red Cross makes mistakes. Critics, however, are too quick to call for something as drastic as a boycott. A portion of the charity’s scandals result from ill-advised attempts to stay ahead of the criticism (empty trucks were ordered to drive around just

after Hurricane Isaac). Critics watch the Red Cross’s every move and then complain that their prey is a polished, empty-chested corporate machine.

Without donations, the Red Cross would quickly fail. In 2015, a relatively quiet year, the organization had a \$159 million deficit. Iowa Republican senator Charles Grassley introduced the American Red Cross Transparency Act last year, which would give Congress greater access to the charity’s records. Fair enough: Aggressive oversight is appropriate for an organization with a nearly \$3 billion budget and preferential treatment from presidents, celebrities, and corporations. But as Lenkowsky notes, “If we didn’t have an organization like the Red Cross we’d have to invent it.”

Americans are wonderfully generous in the face of a catastrophe. The Red Cross gives citizens a place to direct their money and channel their desire to help. We can sleep easy knowing there is someone else planning for the worst. ♦

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Showdown in Arizona

Jeff Flake's uphill battle against the Trumpification of the GOP

By JOHN McCORMACK

Scottsdale, Ariz.

After the cocktail hour ends and the club music fades out in the Camelback Inn ballroom, Senator Jeff Flake takes the stage at the Arizona Tech Summit. With the glow of blue and magenta uplighting in the background, the 54-year-old Republican seems at ease moderating a panel discussion about the state's burgeoning tech industry.

As Flake discusses capital and labor, as well as immigration, tax, and education policy, he sounds like a traditional free-market conservative ready and willing to embrace a new economy, a new Arizona even. "We should staple a green card to every diploma that our U.S. universities offer to foreign students in STEM fields, so I introduced the STAPLE Act, which did precisely that," Flake says at one point, referring to legislation he introduced in 2011.

The crowd is well-dressed, attractive, young, and on the upper end of the income scale, judging by the number of luxury cars in the parking lot. Others on stage that evening spoke in reverent tones about a future of self-driving cars, 5G Internet, and technology we haven't even dreamed of yet. The only hint of political incorrectness comes after Flake has left the room and Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak, the evening's headline speaker, rides a standing Segway-like scooter to take the stage and then tells a joke about four Mexicans. ("What do you call four Mexicans in quicksand?" Wozniak asked in the middle of his interview. "Cuatro sinko.")

The only problem for Flake is that embracing the new economy and rubbing elbows with venture capitalists, tech titans, and yuppies isn't the way to fit into the new Republican party—the party of Trump, populism, and nationalism.

Five nights later, Flake's Trumpist primary challenger, Kelli Ward, held her campaign kickoff event with talk-radio host Laura Ingraham and Steve Bannon, the president's former chief strategist, who has vowed to wage a war on congressional Republicans. "Jeff Flake was for the Gang of Eight amnesty bill," Ingraham told the crowd. She trashed free trade deals and argued that populism is simply about "returning power to the people," adding that "Jeff Flake doesn't trust you, and I think probably in his gut he doesn't like you."

"There's a revolt going on from Alabama to Arizona," Bannon told the crowd gathered at the Hilton Scottsdale Resort & Villas. "This movement is working-class and middle-class people standing up against a permanent political class of global elitists." Ward, a former state senator who practices osteopathy, said she would make Arizona and America great again by serving in the Senate "as a conservative, as a populist, as an Americanist, as a scurrilous nationalist." (In a speech the day before the Ward campaign kickoff, John McCain, Arizona's senior senator, denounced "spurious nationalism.")

Five short years ago, Flake cruised to victory in his first GOP

Senate primary with nearly 70 percent of the vote. Known in the House of Representatives as a budget hawk who bucked congressional leaders and President George W. Bush by opposing earmarks, No Child Left Behind, and Medicare's prescription-drug benefit, Flake had the backing of then-senator Jim DeMint, the most influential patron of Tea Party insurgents. "Jeff Flake is one of the strongest conservative leaders in Congress," DeMint said in his 2012 endorsement. "Nobody has done more to advance the cause of freedom than Jeff Flake. Nobody."

DeMint's insurgency was best summed up by his comment before the 2010 midterm elections that he'd "rather have 40 Marco Rubios than 60 Arlen Specters" in the Senate. (Specter, a liberal Republican till then, had joined the Democratic party in 2009 rather than face a conservative



Jeff Flake at a town-hall event in Mesa, Arizona

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challenger.) “If you want 60 Republicans, you’ve got to have at least 40 to start with who stand on principle,” DeMint explained. But the insurgents of 2010 are now the elitist establishmentarians of 2017. At least that’s how it appears to the likes of Steve Bannon, who thinks Flake, particularly in his criticism of President Trump, is standing on the wrong principles. The Bannon motto seems to be that he’d rather have 40 Kelli Wards than 60 Jeff Flakes in the Senate.

THE HAPPY GLOBALIST

Flake is now in the political fight of his life, trailing Ward by double digits in several polls. With 10 months until the primary, there’s plenty of time to turn things around, but that’s a very bad place for any incumbent to start. The Arizona Senate race matters not only for what it says about the state and future of the Republican party in Arizona and the country, it’s also key to Republicans’ maintaining control of the Senate, where they now have a 52-48 majority.

But if you spend a few minutes talking to Flake or reading his August book, *Conscience of a Conservative*, it’s clear Flake has no interest in winning reelection by pretending to be someone he’s not. When I ask him after the tech summit on October 12 whether immigration reduces the wages of some Americans, Flake is blunt: “We need more robust legal immigration, and we need significant temporary worker programs, more than we have, to account for the labor shortages that we have, particularly in the high-tech area.” He writes in his book that he remains “very proud” of his participation in the Gang of Eight immigration reform bill that passed the Senate in 2013, divided the Republican party, and died in the House.

Flake grew up in a large Mormon family in northern Arizona on a cattle ranch. The work—castrating bull calves and branding cattle—was hard and dangerous. Flake had the tip of his index finger chopped off by machinery. He recalls in his book that when a Border Patrol plane could be heard coming toward the ranch, he’d sometimes jump on a horse and ride away from illegal migrant workers to serve as a decoy. “Growing up with migrant workers, I knew that they usually worked harder than we did,” Flake writes. When his friends from school were hired, they “would last maybe a day or two and were often unreliable.”

The former ranch-hand went on to serve as executive director of the libertarian Goldwater Institute and now happily embraces the “globalist” epithet. Recalling a 2012 blog post that said he had “been seen in the company of globalists in Paris, France,” Flake writes: “*Quel scandale!* Globalist as opposed to what, exactly? A provincialist? A

parochialist? . . . [I]f we don’t trade, we don’t grow. Given the alternatives, I’ll take the globalist moniker, thank you.”

By page 96, it’s abundantly clear that Flake’s *Conscience of a Conservative* is sincere and not some too-clever-by-half campaign strategy. After defending his vote against the very popular Medicare prescription-drug benefit—Flake says he dared House whip Tom DeLay to make him the deciding vote to kill it—he expresses regret for having opposed the politically toxic 2008 bank bailout. “Better known as TARP, no bigger waste of taxpayer money had ever been conceived in the history of the republic—unless you counted the many multiples of that sum that Washington might end up shelling out if the bailout bill failed,” he writes. “TARP was actually a modest price to pay to forestall a global depression.” Flake calls his vote “more an act of cowardice than conscience.”

“If I was to write a book about how to be reelected, I could write that book, I could follow that formula. But to what end?” Flake said on October 12. “If you’re just there to mark time, to go with the flow, and to do what you need just to be reelected without taking a stand, it’s not worth it.”

Flake’s short book is about what he sees as a crisis of conservatism, which, in his telling, is a crisis of principle and policy as well as character and temperament. “Being conservative isn’t just holding conservative views. It’s being conservative in comportment and demeanor,” Flake said. The crisis may have come to a head with Donald Trump, but it did not begin with him. Flake blames cynical partisanship and gamesmanship and the failure of both parties to deliver on their promises for the rise of Trump.

Even in his criticism of Trump, Flake tries to be thoughtful and nuanced. He opens his book by contrasting Nixon’s “madman theory”—encouraging foreign adversaries to think the president is erratic—with his conclusion that the current president actually has impulse-control problems. “Erratic behavior, unmoored from principle, is the opposite of conservatism,” Flake writes. He seems ready to tee off on the president, but cites as an example of Trump’s erratic behavior his upsetting the “One China” policy by taking a congratulatory call from the president of Taiwan after being elected. Flake notes that the “sky didn’t fall” after the call, but points out presidential volatility regarding China is a problem. “Of course, I could be wrong,” he adds, words not usually uttered by a politician.

One of the book’s biggest weaknesses is Flake’s inability to see that his own ideology, in which free-market economics holds primacy, is just one strain of thought within the broader conservative movement and Republican party.

Flake is now in the political fight of his life, trailing Ward by double digits in several polls—a very bad place for any incumbent to start.

Flake writes approvingly of Friedrich Hayek: “For Hayek, the economy wasn’t just another in a list of issues that citizens considered and politicians exploited; the economy was all-encompassing, the whole shooting match. It was that to which all other ‘issues’ are subsumed.” Flake’s own writings elsewhere in the book demonstrate that economic liberty is not the whole shooting match. Economic liberty has little to say about the importance of decency, honor, and morality. It does not guarantee freedom of religion or necessarily make the people of one nation want to be a beacon of liberty for people around the world. As Flake notes later in the book, when Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis was asked in May 2017 what worried him most, Mattis told the *New Yorker*: “The lack of political unity in America. The lack of a fundamental friendliness. It seems like an awful lot of people in America and around the world feel spiritually and personally alienated, whether it be from organized religion or from local community school districts or from their governments.”

‘THAT’S NOT OUR PARTY’

It would be a mistake to view Flake’s current primary predicament as just an ideological one. After all, fellow Gang of Eight member, free trader, and Arizona senator John McCain fended off a primary challenge from Kelli Ward in August 2016, defeating her 52 percent to 39 percent.

There are of course some important differences between McCain and Flake. McCain is a war hero and former POW who served as his party’s presidential nominee and is now in his sixth term in the Senate. Flake is a former head of a libertarian think tank who went on to serve in the House for 12 years before being elected to the Senate.

And for all of the antagonism between John McCain and Donald (“I like people who weren’t captured”) Trump, at the time of the August 2016 primary, McCain still supported the presidential “nominee of my party.” (McCain, along with many other elected Republicans, announced he wouldn’t vote for Trump after the *Access Hollywood* video was released in which Trump bragged about his uninvited kissing and groping of women.) With the exception of Nebraska senator Ben Sasse, no other elected Republican is defined more by his opposition to Trump than Flake.

In Trump’s first meeting with congressional Republicans after wrapping up the GOP nomination in 2016, he immediately recognized Flake. “You’ve been very critical of me,” Trump said, according to Flake. “Yes, I’m the other senator from Arizona—the one who didn’t get captured—and I want to talk to you about statements like that,” Flake replied, before asking about Trump’s comment that Mexico was sending rapists to the United States. Flake writes that Trump brushed off the question and told Flake he was going to lose reelection. “I had to

inform him that I wasn’t on the fall ballot,” Flake writes. Trump may have just been off by two years.

Flake is more than willing to credit Trump for his achievements. “The appointment of Neil Gorsuch was stellar,” he says, before rattling off a list of executive actions he supports, including Trump’s recent one on Obamacare. Flake points out he’s voted for every Obamacare repeal bill that’s come up. “I work with the president when I believe he’s right, I oppose him when I think he’s wrong,” he says. “That’s what I’ve done with every president, Democrat or Republican.”

But Flake understandably makes much more news when he criticizes Trump or Republicans. Take, for example, his criticism of Alabama GOP Senate candidate Roy Moore. When asked about a 2006 op-ed in which Moore argued that the first Muslim elected to Congress should be denied his seat because he’s a Muslim, Flake told the *Atlantic*’s McKay Coppins: “I think that when we disagree with something so fundamental like that, we ought to stand up and say, that’s not right, that’s not our party, that is not us.” A few days later, Flake spoke out on the Senate floor against Democratic colleagues who had questioned the faith of a Catholic judicial nominee and got awfully close to imposing a constitutionally impermissible religious test of their own. That speech received far less attention than his criticism of Roy Moore.

In our interview, Flake mentions some of Trump’s worst behavior—promoting the “ugly conspiracy theory” that Obama was not born in the United States, his comments that a “judge couldn’t judge fairly because of his heritage,” and then “obviously the *Access Hollywood* tape.”

“I’m not sure on which of those issues I shouldn’t have said something,” Flake says. As he writes in his book: “We cannot claim to place the highest premium on character, then abruptly suspend the importance of character in the most vital civic decision that we make. When we excuse on our side what we attack on the other, then we are hypocrites. If we do that as a practice, then we are corrupt.”

THE SENATE IN THE BALANCE

The Arizona Republican primary will add another data point to the debate over the hottest political questions of our day: How much room is there in the GOP to criticize Donald Trump and to what extent is the party transforming itself into a cult of personality? But it probably won’t provide definitive answers, simply because the Arizona Republican party in recent decades has been somewhat schizophrenic—the party of sober-minded senators Jon Kyl, John McCain, and Jeff Flake and governor Doug Ducey but also of more extreme figures like former sheriff Joe Arpaio, former governor Jan Brewer, and now possibly Kelli Ward.

Jennifer Duffy of the *Cook Political Report* says that despite being an underdog, Flake can still win. The two things that could help him the most would be to define his opponent early and for more candidates to jump into the race and split the vote. “If I’m Flake, the more the merrier,” says Duffy. Several names have been thrown around as possible new entrants into the race, including state treasurer Jeff DeWit and former Arizona GOP chairman Robert Graham. Trump has tweeted positive things about Ward, but privately encouraged both DeWit and Graham in August to consider running. Graham tells *THE WEEKLY STANDARD* that he’ll likely decide by Thanksgiving whether to jump in.

Graham expresses concern that both Ward and Flake could lose the general election. He paints Ward as a fringe candidate. In 2014, as a state senator, she held a town-hall event “to address community concerns about chemtrails.” The “chem-trail” conspiracy theory is the belief that those white streaks left in the sky by passing jets aren’t simply engine exhaust but chemicals being dispersed by the government for various nefarious purposes. “When you hear these conspiracy theories, that isolates what I would call reasonable voters. Fringe conspiracy stuff—that’s a really big, big, big thing,” says Graham. Ward now says she doesn’t believe in the chemtrail nonsense but didn’t have an opinion at the time she provided a venue to indulge it. “She tried to talk her way out of it, but there’s public record,” says Graham. Ward’s campaign declined to make her available for an interview for this article.

Graham says his problem with Flake is that his criticism of Trump is too strident, too judgmental, and takes up too much of his attention. “When he was in Congress, people were comfortable supporting him because he defined himself. He was the earmark hawk,” Graham says. “Who is Jeff Flake as a senator? He’s lost all definition.”

The former state party chairman says he’s most worried about losing the seat. The 2018 map favors Republicans—only eight GOP-held Senate seats are up—but Democrats do have a chance to take back the Senate and thereby gain the power to obstruct constitutionalist judicial nominees,

the one thing that Republicans of all stripes seem to like about the Trump presidency. The Democrats’ path to gaining the three seats they need involves keeping all of their own seats (even in deep-red states like North Dakota and Montana), winning seats held by GOP senators in the battleground states of Arizona and Nevada, and then scoring an upset in a strongly Republican state like Tennessee, Nebraska, or Texas. It’s a tall order but not impossible.

Flake’s standing in the polls and his devil-may-care attitude toward criticizing Trump have prompted some speculation that he may not even stay in the race until the

end. I asked Flake if there was any truth to rumors that some Republicans in Washington have encouraged him to step aside so a Republican who’d have an easier time of winning the primary and the general could run. “That sounds like somebody from the other camp spreading rumors to me,” Flake replied, which sounded like a denial, but didn’t precisely sound like the word *no*.

So is he 100 percent committed to staying in the race? “I had a week where my break coincided with my kid’s day off. Instead I’m bouncing back and forth from California to have a fundraiser with Marco Rubio. I’ve got one with Condoleezza Rice next week. I’ve got four or five in between. That doesn’t sound like a candidate ready to hang it up,” Flake says.

Over the summer, Flake faced far more difficult circumstances than any campaign could present. Within the span of two weeks, his father died and Flake survived an assassination attempt. Flake was at the June 14 congressional GOP baseball practice where a progressive activist opened fire on Republicans, critically wounding congressman Steve Scalise and several others. “When you’re pinned down in a dugout with bullets flying over your head, it does give you a little more sense of mortality. But even more it says you better be doing something that’s worth it. It better be worth it,” Flake says.

At the end of our interview, I asked Flake if there’s a point at which the Republican party will no longer be worth it. How many Kelli Wards and Roy Moores can it nominate before it’s time to start thinking about a new party? “I don’t know,” Flake says. “We’re not there yet.” ♦



*The Trumpist team, riding high:
Steve Bannon, Kelli Ward, and Laura Ingraham*

Gillespie's Narrow Path

Can a stalwart of the GOP establishment win Virginia's governorship in Trumpian times?

BY ANDREW EGGER

Abingdon, Va.

It's been nearly a year since Donald Trump's presidential victory tore up the rules of modern politics. Some Republican candidates, like Alabama's Roy Moore, have found success emulating the president's take-no-prisoners approach to campaigning, and a slew of other grassroots challengers will be eager to try the formula in the 2018 midterms. But what about establishment Republicans? Can they spin Trumpian rhetoric into electoral gold? In Virginia, Ed Gillespie is trying to find out.

This is one of two states (New Jersey is the other) that elect their governors in the year following the presidential election. Serving as a political appetizer to the midterms, the Virginia race always attracts national media attention. And occasionally it rewards that attention with a clue about an impending electoral shift, as in 2009 when Republican Bob McDonnell won in a landslide that presaged the congressional red wave of 2010.

Ed Gillespie is the establishment man's establishment man. A lifelong GOP operative, he got his start phone-banking at the Republican National Committee in 1985 and rose to chairman. Gillespie served as a White House counselor to George W. Bush, guided McDonnell to his big victory in 2009, and was a senior adviser to Mitt Romney during his 2012 presidential run. Gillespie only took his first steps as a candidate in his own right in 2014 with an unsuccessful run for Mark Warner's Virginia Senate seat, but he has a wonk's enthusiasm for policy.

"Our economy is stuck, and it needs to get unstuck," Gillespie tells the crowd at a rally here in southwest Virginia on October 14, before rattling off a list of areas he says he'll tackle: unshackling the economy, eliminating poverty, improving schools and public transit, battling the state's opioid epidemic. "I've got plans for everything. I've got so many plans, I had to open up a second website."

Virginia governors are limited to a single four-year term; Gillespie's opponent, Democratic lieutenant governor Ralph Northam, is as close as the state gets to an incumbent. A pediatrician and former military doctor, he served three terms in the state senate before winning his current post in 2014. He has the true Democrat's affection for government spending and technological progress, and campaigns on renewable energy and the computer-oriented "jobs of the future," from data processing to piloting unmanned aircraft. He has enjoyed a respectable lead in the polls for months, and his campaign has as a result been largely focused on not making mistakes.

The Virginia gubernatorial campaign thus appears at first an unremarkable race in a remarkable political time. During their public appearances, Gillespie and Northam trade conventional barbs: The Democrat will bankrupt us with runaway spending, cries Gillespie. The Republican will bankrupt us with irresponsible tax cuts, asserts Northam. The Democrat doesn't support law enforcement. The Republican doesn't support the poor.

But these boilerplate tussles belie the central struggle of the election, which takes place when the candidates leave the television studios and head out to engage with voters, who all want to talk about Trump.

The president is a polarizing figure in Virginia as



Mike Pence with Ed Gillespie at a campaign rally in Abingdon, Virginia, October 14

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SARA D. DAVIS / GETTY

elsewhere. Hillary Clinton carried the state by five points last November. A September Morning Consult poll found Trump's statewide approval rating to be just 42 percent. But Gillespie has learned firsthand the dangers of ignoring the president's supporters: In the June primary, he was almost upset by Corey Stewart, onetime state chairman of Trump's presidential campaign. Stewart ran on the premise that Gillespie was a squish who favored tearing down the state's Confederate monuments (which he doesn't). Polls consistently showed Gillespie enjoying a double-digit lead, but he won the primary by less than two points.

Lesson learned. Gillespie's mission was to find a way to court Trump's core supporters without alienating more traditional Republicans and independents in the state. He quietly hired the sharp-elbowed Jack Morgan, who has worked with both Trump and Stewart, to help with grassroots outreach. And while Gillespie remained upbeat and affably boring in public appearances, his advertising began to take on a darker and more apocalyptic tone.

"I think the way Gillespie presents himself is still largely the same; in debates or interviews, he generally sounds how he sounded when he ran for the Senate in 2014," says Geoffrey Skelley, a political analyst at the University of Virginia Center for Politics. "But his advertising approach has to somewhat be compared to what we saw in the 2016 cycle. . . . There's definitely cause to wonder about dog-whistle politics."

While early Gillespie ads had focused on policies like tax reform and Gillespie's own success story—presenting the candidate as the son of an immigrant and a self-made man—in August, the campaign began to release TV spots and mailers highlighting Northam's support for tearing down Confederate memorials and accusing him of "standing with illegal immigrants" and being soft on violent gangs like MS-13.

It was this last attack, a reference to a tiebreaking vote Northam cast as lieutenant governor earlier this year to kill a bill banning sanctuary cities in Virginia (a symbolic measure, as there are no sanctuary cities in the state), that caught Trump's eye. On October 5, the president tweeted an endorsement of Gillespie: "Ralph Northam, who is running for Governor of Virginia, is fighting for the violent MS-13 killer gangs & sanctuary cities. Vote Ed Gillespie!"

Northam has denounced the ads as "despicable" and accuses Gillespie of "running a campaign based on hatred and bigotry and fear." "Look at the legislation I supported when I was in the senate that made stiffer penalties and

fines for gang members," Northam says in an interview. "To say that I'm soft on crime is totally inaccurate."

Accurate or not, the ads and Trump's approval seem to have helped Gillespie. He and Northam are now competitive in the polls: While most recent surveys show about a five-point lead for Northam, the latest Monmouth study finds 48 percent of likely voters supporting Gillespie and 47 percent supporting Northam—a four-point improvement for the Republican in a month. Monmouth director Patrick Murray points to Gillespie's gains in rural Virginia on crime issues as the driving force behind his rising numbers.

The candidate prefers to attribute his polling gains to voters simply growing more familiar with his policies. "I think as people have focused on the race more, they've seen there's been a cumulative impact of the policies I've

put forward over the last eight or nine months," Gillespie says. "People see that I've got a serious approach to the challenges we face in the commonwealth, and solutions to them, and that that's what my focus is."

Having won the GOP primary by less than two points, Gillespie's mission is to find a way to court Trump's core supporters without alienating more traditional Republicans and independents in the state.

The big name at Gillespie's October 14 rally was Vice President Mike Pence. Abingdon is in ruby-red Washington County, less than 20 miles from the Tennessee border in the Appalachian mountains of southwestern Virginia. Prominent state conserv-

atives took the stage in a corrugated-metal barn to decry the Democratic party and liberal policies ranging from "the war on coal" to toleration for illegal immigration to disrespect for the national anthem. Pence offered Gillespie resounding praise in his remarks, saying he was "on the right side of every issue" and would "never let you down."

A tension between the speakers' fiery rhetoric and Gillespie's more cautious approach was apparent. When the candidate spoke, his detailed policy proposals got polite applause, but he brought down the house when he thanked Pence and Trump for repealing the Clean Power Plan. Abingdon is in the heart of Virginia's coal country.

Still, the rally was a disappointment for Gillespie: The turnout of around 600 was half what he'd hoped the vice president would draw. And although it was designed to energize the base, the rally alienated some grassroots activists after it was reported that Gillespie's campaign had barred Jack Morgan, the former Trump operative and a local favorite, from speaking at the event.

"I will guarantee you all this," Republican activist

William Totten wrote on Facebook following the event. “Should Ed ever run for anything in politics again, I will work my every waking moment to make sure he loses the primary.”

If there’s good news for the GOP ticket, it’s that while Trump voters aren’t nearly as enthusiastic about Gillespie as they are about the president, they see Democratic policy as such an existential threat that they’re likely to turn out to vote anyway.

“He’s the lesser of two evils,” says Abingdon resident and erstwhile Stewart supporter Robert Honaker. “I want a stronger stance on the illegals, especially where ille-



Ed Gillespie and Ralph Northam at their September 19 debate

gals are voting. We’re losing our country because of this. There’s a lot of big business that likes this cheap labor that the taxpayers are paying to keep. . . . We don’t need them in our workforce.” Honaker tells me he has no doubt he’ll vote for Gillespie—in his mind, a Northam victory would mean more illegal immigrants allowed to vote in Virginia and slimmer chances to get candidates like Stewart elected in the future.

Gillespie’s move to the right, however awkward at times, has placed Northam in a difficult position. He had harsh words for the president during the primary, calling him a “narcissistic maniac.” But once he became the Democratic nominee, Northam opted to focus on painting Gillespie as an out-of-touch Washington insider: Gillespie “was Washington’s lobbyist,” he’s quipped, “and now he’s Mr. Trump’s lobbyist.”

“Nobody wants you to be talking about Donald Trump; you’re not connecting with them,” Northam spokesman David Turner says. “But everybody can understand when you’re talking about your health care, bills are going to rise up, and what that means for what’s going to go on in their lives.” “What was the biggest criticism in

the postmortems of Hillary?” he asks. “Almost always, it was she didn’t talk about jobs enough. It was usually like, Donald Trump was always talking about jobs, Hillary Clinton was using identity politics.”

Northam has started to portray Gillespie as a stooge who will enable a dangerous Trump agenda. “This really is the most important election, and it’s because of what we saw in 2016: just a campaign that was based on hatred and bigotry and discrimination and fear, and now what we are watching, which is an embarrassment in Washington,” Northam said at a rally in Virginia Beach on October 17. “And we need to take all of this energy and stand up and say no, no, Mr. Trump. No, Mr. Gillespie. This is not the country that we believe in. . . . When we all go out and vote on November 7, we’re going to tell people that believe in hatred and bigotry and discrimination that they can go away, and don’t ever come back!”

It’s a message that has helped erase any lingering doubt about Northam’s candidacy within the Democratic base. The same day as the Pence rally in Abingdon, former vice president Joe Biden joined Northam in Reston at a summit on jobs with local Democratic activists and business leaders. Biden told Northam he had to win “to give people hope we are not falling into this know-nothing pit.”

Liberals of every stripe are coalescing around Northam’s call for unity, having long since gotten over his defeat of a progressive favorite, who was backed by Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren no less, in the Democratic primary this summer. A ringing endorsement comes from Diana Veazey, a retired minister who once worked at the same children’s hospital as Northam and who attended the Virginia Beach rally. “I don’t know of anybody in this world I have more respect for with his integrity, honesty, his compassion and his caring, and his commitment to support and help people,” she says. “I think he’s one of the most incredible men I’ve ever known.”

For his part, Northam discounts reports of Gillespie gaining ground in polls with a tried-and-true talking point: “The most important poll is on November 7, and there’s a tremendous amount of enthusiasm,” he says. “People are standing up and saying, ‘We’re not going to accept what we saw in 2016; we’re not going to accept that as the new normal.’”

The conventional wisdom is it’s Northam’s race to lose. Virginia has gone for the Democrat in the last three presidential elections and three of the last four governor’s races. Both Virginia senators are Democrats. If Gillespie pulls out the upset, it will be a new thing in American politics: an establishment candidate who had his Trumpian cake and ate it, too.

BILL O’LEARY / WASHINGTON POST / GETTY



Detail from Johannes Vermeer's
The Lacemaker (ca. 1669-70)

Extraordinary Ordinary

How Vermeer and his contemporaries captured everyday life.

BY PAUL A. CANTOR

In the world of art, Johannes Vermeer is a name to conjure with, and any exhibition of his work qualifies as a blockbuster. For the first time since 1996, a major exhibition of Vermeer and his contemporaries is coming to the National Gallery of Art. *Vermeer and the Masters of Genre Painting* debuted at the Louvre in Paris and then moved to the National Gallery of Ireland in Dublin, where I saw it in August. As often happens in traveling exhibitions, six of the paintings displayed in Dublin will not make it to

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**Vermeer and the Masters
of Genre Painting**
National Gallery of Art
through January 21

Washington, but seven new paintings will be added. And never fear: The 10 Vermeers shown in Dublin will all be on display in D.C., and that amounts to a substantial portion of his total output (roughly 34 authenticated paintings).

The exhibition includes such famous examples of Vermeer's art as *Woman with a Pearl Necklace*, *The Lacemaker*, and, one of my personal favorites, *The Astronomer*. The exhibition includes 56 paintings by other artists, such as Gerard ter Borch, Gerrit Dou,

Pieter de Hooch, Gabriel Metsu, and Jan Steen. These painters are so good that the exhibition would be well worth seeing even without the Vermeers, but his masterpieces obviously elevate the show to a "once-in-a-lifetime" opportunity.

Aside from the sheer quality of the paintings, the exhibition is distinguished by the intelligence with which they are organized. This is a case where the whole is truly greater than the sum of the parts. The exhibition has a thesis and it governs the way the paintings are positioned. They are not divided by artist or arranged chronologically. Rather, they are grouped by subject matter—people writing or reading letters, people playing or listening to

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musical instruments, people with pet birds, and so on. This may sound like pure pedantry, but this arrangement turns out to reveal something important about art. We see how a cohort of talented painters, focusing on the same subjects, learned from each other, and especially how their rivalry raised the level of their game as artists.

The rationale behind the exhibition is developed in the catalogue that accompanies it, *Vermeer and the Masters of Genre Painting: Inspiration and Rivalry*, published by Yale University Press and edited by Adriaan Waiboer, head curator of the National Gallery of Ireland. The book includes color reproductions of all the paintings displayed in Paris, Dublin, and Washington, and the essays are informative and illuminating. They are learned but readable, and mercifully free of academic jargon. The title of the essay by Eric Jan Sluiter, “Emulative Imitation Among High-Life Genre Painters,” sums up the thesis of the exhibition and the catalogue. These painters did not work in Olympian isolation. Down in the trenches of the Dutch art market, they battled it out for commercial success, taking motifs from their rivals (dare I say “stealing”?) and giving them new twists. The aim was to achieve what Franciscus Junius, a 17th-century art theorist, called “dissimilar similarity.”

The Vermeer exhibition thus provides an effective counterweight to the way art has often been sold to the general public—namely as the work of solitary creators. Nineteenth-century Romantics came up with the myth of the lonely, misunderstood genius, oblivious to the marketplace and wrapped up in his own private vision of the world. Going into the 19th century, artists were still thought of as craftsmen, delivering a product to please paying customers and integrated into a guild of fellow artists. By contrast, the Romantics, as a revolutionary generation themselves, celebrated the painter as rebel, breaking with tradition and setting out in uncharted waters to create an artistic world of his own.

Thinking of art as self-expression, not craft, the Romantics often con-



Vermeer's Woman Holding a Balance (ca. 1664)

cocted imaginary spiritual biographies for past artists to bring them in line with the new 19th-century notion of painting as confessional. Every artist had to have his own story, preferably involving misunderstanding, rejection, persecution—some form of suffering. To this day most people are Romantics in their understanding of painting. Taking van Gogh as our model, we want to think of the artist as tortured, maybe even a bit mad. At the very least, his vocation should cost him an ear. God forbid he should be a businessman, let alone a successful one.

Vermeer did not acquire his reputation as one of the great masters until the second half of the 19th century, when the Romantic idea of genius had triumphed. And it was very easy to romanticize Vermeer. Given his small output as a painter, the initial lack of facts about his biography, and the way his career was largely confined to the

small town of Delft, he could readily be pictured on the Romantic model of the isolated genius. In the popular imagination Vermeer might as well have been living in a garret in Paris, starving, while devoting himself priest-like to the cause of High Art.

As appealing as this image of Vermeer may be, it ignores the fact that he inherited an art dealership from his father and throughout his life bought and sold paintings as well as creating them. He was thus very aware of trends in the burgeoning art market in the Netherlands in the 17th century. We like to think of *Woman with a Pearl Necklace* as a miracle of creativity, springing spontaneously from Vermeer's head like Athena from Zeus'. But viewing the D.C. exhibition, you will see that this celebrated painting may well have developed out of what we would today call a meme circulating among Dutch artists, represented



The Astronomer by Johannes Vermeer (1668)

by such works as Gerard ter Borch's *Young Woman at Her Toilet with a Maid*, Caspar Netscher's *Woman at Her Toilet*, Jan Steen's *Young Woman with a Letter*, and Frans van Mieris's *Woman Before a Mirror*. We think of Vermeer as deriving his inspiration directly from the world he lived in, copying objects right in front of his eyes. This exhibition shows that Vermeer always had one eye trained on his contemporaries' work, and he learned to paint by copying other painters, not just the real world.

None of this in any way diminishes Vermeer's greatness as a painter. If anything, it should enhance our appreciation of his art. The other paintings serve as foils to highlight what sets Vermeer apart. Ignore all the labels and you will still have no problem picking out the Vermeers in this exhibition. Of the 66 paintings, the 10 best are unquestionably the Vermeers. They have a unique luminosity and superior composition of their elements, they are

unequaled in the richness and subtlety of their colors and textures, and, above all, they have a psychological depth lacking in almost all the other paintings. At their most conventional, some of the other paintings veer toward the cartoonish, whereas Vermeer never offers less than complex human beings. The way he paints his figures, especially the women, we seem to be peering into their souls. Whereas the other painters generally present us with obvious and readily comprehensible situations, Vermeer leaves us wondering: "What's happening here? What are these people thinking?"

This exhibition is, then, testimony to Vermeer's uniqueness as a painter, but if he stands out among his contemporaries in terms of quality, that does not mean that he worked in isolation from them. And to be fair to Vermeer, with several of these paired paintings, it is hard to tell whether Vermeer was influenced by the other artist or he

was influenced by Vermeer. As a result, this exhibition does a wonderful job of conveying a sense of the incredible breadth and depth of artistic talent in the Netherlands in the 17th century. My favorites among the subordinate cast are Gerrit Dou and Gabriel Metsu—both of whom fully justified solo exhibitions of their work at the National Gallery in past years (2000 and 2011, respectively).

The exhibition is also a good reminder of the vagaries of artistic reputation. When Vermeer was all but forgotten in the 18th century, Gerrit Dou was riding high, widely viewed as one of the greatest of the Dutch masters, equal if not superior to his teacher—someone named Rembrandt. (Already in the 17th century, Dou's reputation was such that he commanded the highest prices for his paintings of all the artists in the exhibition, including Vermeer.) In the second half of the 19th century, Dou's star fell, even as those of Rembrandt and Vermeer rose, to the point where Dou was all but forgotten in the first half of the 20th century. As this exhibition documents, Dou deserves to be better known among the general art public. Of all the pairings in the exhibition, Dou comes closest to equaling Vermeer's achievement in the juxtaposition of his two *Astronomer by Candlelight* paintings with Vermeer's *The Astronomer* and *The Geographer*. Thanks to Dou's deployment of candlelight illumination à la Georges de La Tour, for once we see a painter conveying as much inner spirituality as Vermeer does.

The Romantics claimed that commerce is incompatible with culture: The genuine artist must turn his back on the marketplace and his contemporaries, and follow the inner light of his personal vision. Although many artists have achieved greatness by pursuing this route, the Vermeer exhibition serves as an important corrective to this one-sided conception of art by insisting that aesthetic progress may grow out of a community of competitive individuals, spurring each other to new heights of artistic achievement. In the supposedly rarefied world of

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painting, the story of Vermeer and his rivals is a tribute to what (relatively) free markets can accomplish (the guilds restricted trade in paintings among the Dutch cities). For the Dutch, the spirituality of art turns out to be rooted in the materiality of the marketplace.

We tend to forget how important the 17th-century Dutch Republic was in the development of capitalist civilization. In many ways, the Netherlands was ahead of Britain in this process. Amsterdam had a stock market before London did. The material wealth accumulated by Dutch merchants and manufacturers created a broader market for paintings than had ever existed before. Traditionally artists had depended on the church and the aristocracy for patronage. In the Netherlands in the 17th century, painters found they could sell their works to increasingly wealthy middle-class customers eager to adorn their homes and display their cultivated taste. Not surprisingly, the emergence of a multitude of middle-class patrons of art attracted talented people to painting, and they began to flood the market with landscapes, portraits, and the kind of genre paintings featured in the Vermeer exhibition.

It is no accident that what we call genre painting flourished in the Netherlands in the 17th century. These paintings offer glimpses into the daily lives of upper-middle-class people. They show women engaged in everyday household activities, like making lace or preparing food. They picture the middle class enjoying the new luxury of musical concerts at home (imagine the thrill of having your own harpsichord in your living room—the subject of several of these paintings). Above all, these paintings reveal the ups and downs of romantic affairs. They feature men courting women, lovers communicating in the face of absence, lovers suffering the pangs of anticipation and of rejection, and so on. For the first time, a broad segment of the middle class could afford paintings and what it evidently wanted in art was a mirror of its own middle-class way of life. As evidence of the new Dutch vogue for artistically decorating the home, roughly one-third



Astronomer by Candlelight by Gerrit Dou (ca. 1665)

of the works in the catalogue feature paintings hanging on the walls of the rooms depicted.

When the church and the aristocracy were the patrons of art, it is hardly surprising that artists chose to paint religious, mythological, and historical subjects. Knowing who their patrons were, artists aspired to produce big paintings with big themes—a crucifixion or a coronation. The Dutch genre painters operated on a different scale. What is so striking for a set of masterpieces is how small all the paintings in this exhibition are. They had to be if they were to be affordable to middle-class customers.

Thus in the 17th century in the Netherlands, painting took a giant step toward the increasingly true-to-life representation of reality. In the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, painters tended to take only religious and aristocratic subjects seriously. To the extent that everyday life crept into their

paintings, it was only in the context of a religious narrative. If I had to pick the earliest example of genre painting in art history, I would offer Robert Campin's *Merode Triptych* (ca. 1420-30). Under the guise of telling the story of the Virgin Mary, Campin creates in the triptych's right wing a self-contained portrait of the kind of carpenter's shop he might have passed every day in his hometown—right down to a very realistic set of carpenter's tools. If detached, the right wing would be a perfect example of Dutch genre painting—a moment of ordinary contemporary life caught in exquisite detail.

Campin could get away with painting a standalone carpenter's shop, but not with just any old carpenter—it had to be the Virgin Mary's husband, Joseph. The so-called Flemish Primitives, including Campin, van der Weyden, and the van Eyck brothers, loved portraying daily life in all its material reality; to do so they pioneered oil

paint as a medium. Only at that stage of art history, painting everyday life needed justification in terms of something that was not everyday. Much as Erich Auerbach argues about literature in his magisterial book *Mimesis*, the representation of everyday reality in painting emerged in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance largely under the influence of Christianity and its sanctification of ordinary life. Only a religious theme could give sufficient gravitas to everyday reality to justify taking it seriously in painting.

As crude as it may sound, middle-class money liberated Dutch painters to deal directly with everyday life in its own terms. As you walk through *Vermeer and the Masters of Genre Painting*, think about how relentlessly secular the paintings are and how odd that is in light of the prior history of European painting (even one generation earlier, Rembrandt still devoted a great number of his paintings to religious themes). No crucifixions, no resurrections, no transfigurations, no Madonnas, no saints. (Vermeer's *Woman Holding a Balance* comes closest to being religious, with a painting of the Last Judgment in the background that supplies a religious subtext to the painting: "You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting.") For these Dutch painters, ordinary life has become worthy of serious treatment in all its ordinariness. And, at least in Vermeer's paintings, ordinary life begins to acquire its own spirituality—it has its own depth, even without reference to a religious background. That is the great achievement of Dutch genre painting and why it has such a powerful appeal even today.

Being an English professor, as I viewed the Vermeer exhibition in Dublin, the city of James Joyce and *Ulysses*, I could not help thinking how novelistic these paintings are. We often credit the English novelists of the 18th century—Defoe, Richardson, Fielding, Sterne—with having discovered how to portray ordinary middle-class life in art, to give expression to the joys and pains of everyday existence, especially in the tangled webs of romance

between men and women. But this Vermeer exhibition offers visual proof that all these subjects were being taken up decades earlier in Dutch genre painting. Each painting reads like a chapter in a novel—for example, the beginning or end of a courtship. As in 18th-century English novels, particularly

Defoe's, we see an art that reflected the new interest in material things that accompanied the rise of the middle class. We need to give the Dutch more credit—they pioneered not only the economic institutions of middle-class life, but also its representation in artistic form. ♦

BCA

Let Us Think Together

Knowledge requires character and community.

BY CHAD WELLMON

In 1637, René Descartes recounted a "fable" of how he came to think well. From his youth, he had read the books of the ancients, exercised his rhetorical skills, and observed the debates of philosophers and theologians. But in all this learning he found no rest or certainty, only endless disputes and puffed-up opinions. "Nothing solid," he concluded, "could have been built on such unfirm foundations." Once he escaped the control of his schoolteachers, he abandoned the "study of letters" and resolved to seek no knowledge other than what he could find in "the great book of the world"—collecting experiences and testing himself "in the encounters that fortune offered me."

A century and a half later, Immanuel Kant promoted a similar intellectual self-reliance. It is easy to let others think for me, he wrote in 1784, "if I have a book that thinks for me, a pastor who has a conscience for me, a doctor who judges my diet for me." But such indolence, he warned, was not true

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How to Think

A Survival Guide for a World at Odds

by Alan Jacobs

Currency, 157 pp., \$23

thinking. It was immaturity. When it comes to real, trustworthy knowledge, it's best to rely on one's own rational capacities—not those of books or professionals or the church.

For these two giants of European philosophy, thinking was not only a matter of well-wrought arguments but also of a well-developed character. Thinking well required autonomy and resolution. The motto of enlightenment, as Kant formulated it, was an imperative to be brave and dare to reason on your own: "*Sapere aude*. Have courage to use your own understanding!"

Both Descartes and Kant married philosophical argument with ethical formation: To think well requires becoming a different person, developing certain characteristics and habits, and adopting certain ends. Thinking well isn't just a matter of the beliefs one holds but also of the desires one cultivates. Descartes and Kant wanted readers to change their lives by thinking differently. In this sense, they are part of what Alan Jacobs in his engrossing and hopeful new book calls a "humanistic

tradition” of thinking about thinking.

In *How to Think*, Jacobs, a professor in the honors program at Baylor University, offers a straightforward but powerful argument. Knowledge, he suggests, is best understood not as right or justified belief but as a good created by people who think well because of the kind of people they have become.

In Jacobs’s account, the authority and trustworthiness of knowledge is grounded in the very character of those who create, share, and safeguard it. To believe some *claim* is also to trust some *person*. It is, ideally at least, to trust that he or she has thought well about the matter at hand—so Jacobs writes not about trustworthy knowledge but rather about the activity of thinking well. Like playing chess or basketball well, you have to practice it. Jacobs devotes a series of short chapters to elements of mental exercise, describing the energy, patience, discipline, and repetition required to better understand yourself and the world and to avoid being duped. Before replying to that Facebook post or tweet, count to 10, think about what you’re doing, and put down the phone. This is hard work, and it takes practice.

When Kant reflected on the limits of reason at the end of the 18th century, he and his contemporaries were worried about the proliferation of print. Jacobs’s reflections are motivated by a similar technological concern—but whereas Kant suspected that books had begun to think for us, Jacobs worries that the prevalence of social media exacerbates our already bad intellectual habits.

In contrast to Descartes and Kant and other boosters of self-reliant rationalism, Jacobs contends that the pursuit of excellence in thinking requires exemplars. If you are to have courage and think for yourself, it can help to have a community that supports and honors thoughtful practices. Jacobs rightly distinguishes between communities of shared beliefs and communities of shared practices. Spend more time, he advises, with the latter—those who share a disposition or set of characteristics conducive to good thinking—than with those who simply espouse the same

opinions. People who exemplify the traits and characteristics of good thinking might have more to teach us than those who happen to profess the same beliefs we hold. When I want to think hard about an issue, I don’t call up the folks I go canvassing with in Novem-



To Jacobs, our biases orient us in the world and help us manage the constant flow of information. Without biases, ‘the cognitive demands of having to assess every single situation would be so great as to paralyze us.’ One of the crucial tasks of reflection, then, is to distinguish the prejudices that help us to find truth from those that block us from it.

ber. I call my friend Matt, who disagrees with me on most things but knows how to think.

Jacobs’s more fundamental point is that in evaluating the trustworthiness of knowledge, we should focus not only on the properties of a particular claim or belief but also on the characteris-

tics of the person making it. Echoing social psychologist Daniel Kahneman and German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer, Jacobs calls these characteristics biases—prejudices, customs, or emotional predispositions. Although we’re taught from a very early age to be wary of harmful biases, it is impossible to avoid biases entirely: They orient us in the world and help us manage the constant flow of information. Without biases, “the cognitive demands of having to assess every single situation would be so great as to paralyze us.” One of the crucial tasks of reflection, then, is to distinguish the prejudices that help us to find truth from those that block us from it.

Thinking well also requires motivation. We think, Jacobs writes, because we hope to become “more than we currently are.” And herein lies both the promise and peril of thinking well: We only rarely know at the outset the goods that thinking well might provide. The ends of an education in thinking are often difficult to discern let alone articulate. Thinking well will always surprise and, as Jacobs notes, whoever attempts it may begin with only a vague sense of who they might become.

For Jacobs, then, thinking well is a matter of character: the character of the thinker and the character of those whose claims and arguments are being assessed. Learning to think well, he writes (channeling John Stuart Mill), is to become “alive in all your parts and therefore ready to perceive the world as it is.”

And it is this last suggestion—that thinking well should lead us to “perceive the world as it is”—that raises an important question about Jacobs’s character-based model of thinking. What is its ultimate purpose? To find truth (“what the world is really like”)? Or to cultivate plural and sometimes distinct ideals and virtues for thinking well? At times, Jacobs seems committed to the former, the view that thinking well has an external measure—truth—and his concern for thinking well is primarily a concern for the types of virtues that will most reliably lead to truth. At other times, though, Jacobs seems committed to the

latter, which assumes that the ideal of an “adequate” response to the world might vary across time and space, and so thinking well in one time and place might be very different from thinking well in another. Which is it?

The notion that there are multiple ways of knowing should not be dismissed as a naïve or lazy relativism, a banal call for “open-mindedness.” It rests, rather, on the premise that no account, no vision of knowledge can ever be fully “adequate to what the world is really like,” because the world is so wondrously ordered that no single vision, however internally coherent, could ever subsume it. Call it an ethics of knowledge for a post-Newtonian world.

The compelling beauty of Jacobs’s account of a life lived well and thoughtfully shines through best in his descriptions of the ideal thinker as generous, imaginative, and caring. Unlike the virtues of intellectual self-reliance celebrated by Descartes and Kant, the virtues Jacobs extols are well suited to a world that is beautiful

precisely because no one account or model or theory is ever fully adequate to it. Our vision of the intellectual habits, practices, and virtues needs to be capacious and plural. Jacobs quotes the Roman playwright Terence: “I am human, and nothing human is alien to me.” We are more fully human in our differences and constant struggle to understand them.

Such an account of thinking well would allow us to approach what the philosopher of science Nancy Cartwright, drawing on Gerard Manley Hopkins, calls the “dappled world” with the care, discipline, love, and humility that permeate *How to Think* and Jacobs’s writing generally. Our particular accounts of the world may well be true—and yet also never fully adequate to the world as it is. To acknowledge that is not a failure of thought; it is the mark of a well-thinking person. The ways we think emerge from who we are always becoming. And this is surely more adequate to a dappled world. ♦

of beauty, if it is to be honest, must reckon with the radical evils of the age.

Born in New York City in 1921, Richard Purdy Wilbur was raised in an artists’ colony of sorts in Caldwell, New Jersey. A callow but witty pacifist during his years as a student and all-around literary man at Amherst College, when the United States declared war Wilbur immediately rallied to the cause and soon enlisted in the signal corps. His military superiors, however, got wind of his “leftist” chatter in the barracks, not to mention his subscription to the *Daily Worker*, and he was expelled from his course in codebreaking. They would also have prevented him from serving overseas had the need for reinforcements not become desperate.

In 1944, Private Wilbur of the 36th Infantry Division was never far from the front lines as the U.S. Army invaded Italy and France and then pursued retreating Nazi soldiers into German territory. Charged with setting up mobile command centers as American forces advanced across Europe, Wilbur bore careful witness to his division’s adventures and to the people and terrain they were swiftly liberating. Like other GIs, he offered his spare rations to starving Italians whose crops had been stolen or burned by the Nazis. He experienced firsthand the savage hatred of the French for their German occupiers. In Arbois, a young pharmacist and father of three would tell Wilbur that no one resented the American bombardment that had left his “whole town flat.” Anything, the pharmacist said, to be free of such horrors as these:

On the steps of that fountain I saw [German soldiers] take five young men and kick them in the genitals, beat them in their faces with gun butts, and shoot them dead. I had a friend, the best surgeon in this department. He took care of one partisan who was wounded: the Germans dug out his eyes with a fork and with little knives cut off his arms and legs.

Wilbur recorded such details in his journal and in letters home to his wife, Charlee, often while he was sheltering from German bombardment in the 3-by-3-by-6 foxholes the hulking American soldier would dig for himself adjacent



Richard Wilbur Remembered

The life and work of a great American poet.

BY JAMES MATTHEW WILSON

U ntil his death on October 14, Richard Wilbur had spent nearly half a century as America’s greatest living poet. A writer of opulent forms and playful wit, whose rhymed and measured stanzas combined the intellectual complexities of modernist verse with the familiar pleasures of an

older tradition, Wilbur was also the last great metaphysical poet of the 20th century. In poem after poem, he gave voice to the subtle rhymes between earthly and divine, the quotidian and the transcendent, as they call the human soul out into the winsome particularities of the world and beyond them to the mind of their creator. The son of an accomplished painter, he had an instinctive respect for the integrity of the artist. Coming into his maturity just as the conflagration of the Second World War began, he early perceived that the praise

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to his succession of field outposts.

When the Army arrived in Nazi territory, German civilians also greeted American soldiers with open arms, but Wilbur kept his distance. The warmth of the liberated affirmed for Wilbur the goodness of the world and the plausible triumph of joy even in the wake of destruction. But he also bore witness to the depravity and murder of the Nazi regime persisting at the heart of such goodness and joy as if moral contradiction ran all the way down to the bowels of reality.

Even after American forces were “bivouacked in the sunny, pleasant and hygienic Bavarian town of Kaufburen,” he wrote, “a Nazi institution for the extermination of the idiot children continued serenely to operate in our midst.” He saw with clarity “the devilishness of the Nazi mind”—committing clandestine, racist murders behind the respectable walls of a hospital, even as the civilians at large seemed to welcome the restoration of peace and justice by the American soldiers just outside. The goodness of the world suffers within itself real evil. In consequence, blessing and joy can heal sin and evil but they can also hide these things from us.

A recent biography—*Let Us Watch Richard Wilbur* by Robert and Mary Bagg—offers a definitive account of Wilbur’s wartime experiences and helps us see how they gave rise to his literary achievement. Two years after the war, Wilbur would publish a small book of poems, *The Beautiful Changes* (1947). There, we see beauty fall upon the bombed-out landscape and silence of the dead during the “First Snow in Alsace”:

As if it did not know they’d changed,
Snow smoothly clasps the roofs of
homes
Fear-gutted, trustless and estranged.

The ration stacks are milky domes;
Across the ammunition pile
The snow has climbed in sparkling
combs.

You think: beyond the town a mile
Or two, this snowfall fills the eyes
Of soldiers dead a little while.

Snow covers the wounded earth with
a new beauty and the poet gets his

eye full. So do those unseeing eyes of the dead. Blessing overcomes atrocity, Wilbur observes, but enjoyment of the world’s beauty can also lead to an aesthete’s or “dandy’s” whitewashing indifference to evil. Are we to savor or recoil from the sight of those snow-covered dead eyes?

One page over, Wilbur engages an opposite quandary. Given the clear evil of the Nazi regime, a person may despair of the world itself and denounce it. Is it possible still to revere and respect the integrity of goodness, beauty, and art, even while decisively

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condemning those guilty of moral horrors? “On the Eyes of an SS Officer” begins with a nimble series of similes, as the poet contemplates his subject with apparent professional disinterest, before he steps back from such likenings to speak literally of the officer:

But this one’s iced or ashen eyes
devise,
Foul purities, in flesh their wilder-
ness,
Their fire; I ask my makeshift God
of this
My opulent bric-a-brac earth to damn
his eyes.

The poem prefaces and so seems to insulate Wilbur’s hatred, but not so as to hijack and dissolve it for “aesthetic” ends. Rather, both beauty and horror are seen together, and within the freedom of the work of art a little righteous hatred is allowed to intrude.

Upon returning from the war, Wilbur began graduate work at Harvard and was soon nominated to its Society of Fellows. In the years immediately following, critics recognized him as one of the two or three greatest American poets of what is often called the “middle generation”—those writers a few decades younger than William Carlos Williams and T.S. Eliot but coming of age a decade or more before a formless, hallucinatory insanity overtook American letters (and culture) with the Beatniks of the fifties and the hippies of the sixties.

Wilbur’s reputation weathered attack but continuously grew. He won two Pulitzers and the National Book Award. He became the celebrated and standard translator of the French verse dramas of Molière and Corneille. He contributed lyrics to Leonard Bernstein’s *Candide* (1956) and, in 1986, also composed the lyrics for William Schuman’s *On Freedom’s Ground*, a cantata performed to celebrate the centennial of the Statue of Liberty. He was appointed the second U.S. poet laureate in 1987.

Such accolades cannot capture the distinction of Wilbur’s achievement half so well as do the early attacks upon his work. As the Baggs document, his contemporaries—foremost among them John Berryman, Robert Lowell, Elizabeth Bishop, and Randall Jarrell—immediately accepted Wilbur as one of their own, that is, as one of the more important midcentury “new” or “academic” formalists who sought to reestablish the techniques of meter and rhyme after their abandonment for free verse during the modernist revolution earlier in the century. But they also looked on him with envy and condescension. Their poetry was violent in emotion, daring in ambition, and fragmentary and obscure in expression; their use of poetic form jagged, tense, and erratic. In contrast, sneered Jarrell, Wilbur’s work was “delicate, charming, and skillful”; it was “*attractive and appealing and engaging*.” Clearly there was something wrong with him! It drove Berryman to drink. Bishop muttered from abroad at such unwarranted hype.

In retrospect, it seems that poets like Lowell and Berryman treated poetic form as an anguished and difficult exercise, as if to suggest that serious art required a forceful grip and all the rigor of a gnostic cult; otherwise, the world and the poet's mind would simply fall to pieces. Eliot had once posited that poetic tradition "cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour." Lowell and most other middle-generation poets made a whole technique out of laboriousness. Wilbur's work, in contrast, took into itself with ease all of the wit and ironical sophistication of modern poetry, but was composed with an elegant, august, and musical rhetoric that stood in filial and cheerful continuity with the whole of our literary tradition. Smart and graceful, recognizable as poetry even to the "naïve" amateur, his work immediately rewards the ear while also gratifying patient study.

According to the Baggs, the poets of that generation were fiercely competitive, Wilbur included. Lowell had the unhappy habit—signaling he was due for yet another stay in the mental hospital—of forcing his Harvard students to rank in order the greatest living poets. In such a climate of competition, Wilbur seemed out of the running. His work was backward, conservative, and sunny, while Lowell and others drilled down to the essence of advanced art in suffering and mania.

But time was on Wilbur's side. Not only did he outlive his best contemporaries by decades, but the differences between his poetry and theirs made him a model and mentor for those younger poets who were more or less unimpressed by the mannered disruptions of modernist literature. Such poets seek to practice the art in continuity with a literary tradition that reconciles rhetorical grace with intellectual seriousness, one which holds together a clear vision of the world's fallenness with a sense of the underlying goodness of creation. Wilbur, almost alone, spanned the gap.

Although Wilbur was no more devout a Christian than the typical man of his generation, his poetry frequently takes for its themes the soul, good and evil, and the traces of divine intention

found in the word and world of God's creation. This further set him apart from the existential anguish pervasive among his fellow poets and lends his verse a gravity and authority that a figure like Lowell could only simulate by acting appalled.

As the Baggs observe, the otherwise reliable critic Adam Kirsch has recently tried to reinstate the old criticisms of Wilbur, painting the poet as a happy hedonist who aestheticizes



Richard Wilbur in 1966

the horrors of the modern age with an almost immoral refinement of style. But religious faith is not merely complacent cheer, and it is inane to propose that violent subject matter may only—or even best—be represented by doing violence to form and language. Such charges have not aged well.

There is still another way time proved to be on Wilbur's side. In interviews, Wilbur sometimes referred to himself as a slow writer, and yet his collected poems come to more than 500 pages. In addition to the dense, ornate, and polished poems of his first two books—*The Beautiful Changes* and *Ceremony* (1950)—his third, *Things of This World* (1956), contains at least 10 poems that will endure. He wrote fewer poems thereafter; his next two books, spaced over two decades, show a maturity and mastery of craft, but

also an openness to more personal subject matter and familiarity of voice. In those volumes, I would add, it seemed Wilbur had lost a step.

But no, or not for long. Only in the poems first gathered for his *New and Collected Poems* (1988) does Wilbur achieve mature expression of his enduring theme: the way in which the world speaks to us as a creation of the divine wisdom, and our necessity and difficulty of finding a condign language to speak, in turn, about it. "For C.," a poem to his wife and about the long, steady love of their marriage, was published in 1997, when Wilbur was 75. It is not only one of his finest poems, it is the best love lyric of the second half of the 20th century and also a powerful, witty celebration of the patience, the slow and steady growth and craft, entailed in the making of a marriage or any lasting work. Wilbur wrote "Blackberries for Amelia" in 2003, at the age of 82; a meditation on the gift of a granddaughter in the vastness of the cosmos, it is one of the best poems of the new century. His last book, *Anterooms*, appeared in 2010, and though slight in bulk and brittle in style, it sounds a profound new note as Wilbur reflects on the loss of his wife (in 2007) and stands in contemplation of the threshold of his own mortality. It shows him prepared to pass through that door with the well-measured steps of one who has lived, and written, well.

It is true that Wilbur's career did not comprehend the kinds of dramatic change of subject and style we find in other great modern poets, such as Eliot and Yeats. Much like the poetry of Robert Frost, whom Wilbur knew at Amherst and Harvard, his work mel-
lowed, broadened, ripened, but maintained a clear continuity, a Horatian polish and Christian humanism, from beginning to end. We can be grateful for the life of this American master, whose work outdistanced the fashions of the last century and now, brought to its completion at last, offers to a new age an example of the genuine, enduring, and well made, "Like a good fiddle, like the rose's scent, / Like a rose window or the firmament."

◆ BETTMANN / GETTY

Diamonds Are Forever

The changing face of the old ballgame.

BY JOSEPH EPSTEIN

As the major league playoffs continue on into the World Series, there is lots of talk—complaining, really—about the lengthening time it takes to play, and therefore watch, a baseball game. The average time of a baseball game is now three hours and five minutes. I don't know if the average time of a baseball game was even tracked in the good/bad old days of my youth, but I remembered games with fast-working pitchers on the mound—Bob Gibson, Fergie Jenkins—that were completed at just under two hours, roughly the length of a movie. The young today seem especially put off by the slowness of baseball; the average age of the baseball television audience is 57, with only 7 percent of its viewers under the age of 18.

Worrisome, all this, especially if one owns a baseball franchise or even if one has an emotional investment in baseball such that one wishes it not to lose its place as the national pastime and dwindle into a game enjoyed chiefly by codgers. Former baseball commissioner Bud Selig was sufficiently worried to have formed a committee composed of baseball owners and executives, general managers and field managers to come up with ways to speed up the game without, the hope is, changing its essential character. The new commissioner, Rob Manfred, is even more intent on shortening the game. Thus far the only change put into effect is that teams no longer have to go through the paces of an intentional walk by purposely throwing four bad pitches; the intentional walk can

now quickly be executed by the manager's simply signaling for it from the dugout, though the time saved by this reform is minimal, less than a minute, I'd guess. Talk is also being bruited about reducing the number of pitching changes allowed in a game, about shortening the time permitted a pitcher between pitches (it is now 12 seconds, although the rule is notoriously unen-



Nationals manager Dusty Baker awaits a ruling from umpires, October 6.

forced), about the number of trips a catcher can make to the mound to confer with his pitcher, about limiting the times a batter is allowed to step out of the batter's box between pitches and, who can say, about not permitting an outfielder, in his lonely isolation, to adjust his crotch.

Boredom is the great enemy here. Too many people now find baseball, because of its slowness, tedious in the extreme. Why aren't I—a man easily bored by unstylishly written books, dull lectures, misfired TV sitcoms, most theater, much of the news, and all politicians—also bored by baseball? Far from being bored by the sport, the older I get the more I have come to appreciate the genius inherent in the game. As a man who has had the sports disease from the age of 6, I now find baseball easily the most intricate, the most pleasing, the best of all sports.

In what other sport can a last-place team beat a first-place team three or four games in a row and sweep a series? (In basketball or football, where superior skill if not brute force wins every time out, this is unlikely to happen even once.) In what other sport is tension so extended as in baseball, where in a play-off or World Series or even mid-season game a pitcher, in late innings in a tied game or with a one-run lead with the bases loaded and no one out, is in a fix—a fix that could take him as long as 20 or more tense minutes to work out of or that could prove his team's undoing? In what other sport is what not Yogi Berra but Aristotle called *peripeteia*, or reversal of fortune, so frequent as in baseball, where a single error or an unexpected injury can close down a team's hopes for a season or the acquisition of a new player in a trade completely revive its prospects? In what other sport is there a season of similar length—162 games—which over this longish haul allows for impressive comebacks after poor beginnings and which requires an almost philosophical perspective to accept rises and falls on the part of players and fans alike, while providing, for roughly seven months, nearly everyday entertainment for its devotees?

No other sport is so intricate in its maneuverings as baseball. The former manager Tony La Russa, in George Will's excellent 1990 book *Men at Work: The Craft of Baseball*, posited eight different strategies available to a manager with men on first and third and one out. To grasp the richness of baseball's complications, its language, its arcana, one needs to have grown up with it, to have played it as a kid. At a Cubs-Dodgers game, I once attempted to explain baseball to Bonnie Nims, the wife of the poet John Frederick Nims, and at the end of my six-inning-long instruction, I asked if everything was becoming clear to her. "I think so," she said. "I believe I understand just about everything you've said except for this concept of 'the out.'"

Baseball may also be the last major American sport in which one doesn't have to be freakishly large—a 300-pound lineman or 250-pound running back in football, a 6-foot-10 power forward or 6-foot-5 guard in basketball—

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to succeed. Tony Gwynn, the greatest hitter in the game over the past 40 years, was a pudge who probably couldn't have qualified as the mascot for any major college athletic program.

For the sports-minded, as for the politically minded, there is a spectrum ranging from conservative to radical, and it is not uncommon for a radical in politics to be archconservative in the realm of sports, and sometimes vice versa. Sports radicals do not in the least mind changes in their sport—ranging from designated hitters in baseball, to shot clocks in basketball, to coaches' red-flag challenges of referees' calls in football. Sports conservatives would like everything in the games they love to stay forever the same. Sports conservatives, for example, loathe the American League designated hitter rule in baseball to this day, even though it has been in practice since 1973, a full 44 years. Sports radicals think improvement through change always possible and usually desirable. I'm surprised no one among them has yet proposed solving the problem of the lengthening of baseball games in a single stroke by reducing all games to five innings, thereby allowing everyone to return home early to his video games and Reddit.

Change there has of course been in baseball, undeniable and irrecoverable. As was recently argued in the *Wall Street Journal* by Brian Costa and Jared Diamond, baseball has become ever more analytic in recent decades, in ways that invariably extend the length of the game. By analytic, they mean driven and controlled by sabermetrics, the study of stats that measure in-game action. The whole business probably began when someone discovered that, statistically at least, left-handed pitchers do better against left-handed hitters, and right-handed pitchers do better against right-handed hitters. This paved the way for more pitching changes and differing batting orders to face either right- or left-handed pitchers. In the 1920s there were pitchers who pitched both games of a double-header. As recently as the 1940s, relief pitchers were a rarity. In our day, if a pitcher can get through six innings,

he is thought to have had a successful outing. So specialized has the game become that pitchers make a living—often a handsome one—as one-inning (the seventh, the eighth) specialists.

As with pitching, so with other aspects of baseball: Change and complication has made for longer games. More and more teams have devised defensive shifts for opposing batters, which in turn causes the batters to disdain hitting ground balls and instead to swing for the fences. This past year there were record numbers of home runs and strikeouts, both making for a longer time at bat. Costa and Diamond note that on average this season the ball was put into play only every 3 minutes 48 seconds. A batter who fouls off six or seven pitches can be in the batter's box for five full minutes and more.

Then, of course, there is the matter of the influence of money in lengthening games. When a journalist approached the late television sports producer Don Ohlmeyer saying he had a question for him, Ohlmeyer replied: "If the question is about sports, the answer is money." Striking out, once a matter of disgrace in baseball, is now of negligible concern—negligible, that is, if a player can hit 30 or more home runs during a season. The big money goes for the dingers. A Chicago Cubs outfielder named Kyle Schwarber this past season in 422 times at bat struck out 150 times, but he hit 30 home runs. Yankees rookie Aaron Judge was at bat 542 times and 208 of those times he struck out, but over the season hit 52 homers. No one is going to remember those strikeouts. His agent will lead with that 52 homers statistic when negotiating a vastly enriched renewal of Judge's contract, which he is sure to acquire.

Staying with the subject of the influence of money, a sports Marxist might argue that the most efficient way to reduce the time it takes to play major league baseball is to cut down on, if not eliminate, commercials. I have recently timed the commercials between half-innings at baseball games, and they run to three minutes each. This means that given 17 such breaks over nine innings, television commercials alone account for 51 minutes; add in another

18 minutes for the commercials aired during six pitching changes, and you have 1 hour and 9 minutes of a ballgame given over to commercials. A sports Marxist might be inclined here to argue, on the model of socialized medicine, for socialized (or commercial-free) baseball, though none has thus far come forth to do so.

The slowness of baseball doesn't seem such a problem if one goes to the park to watch a game. The punishment of the commercials, with their dreary repetition, makes it so. (Speaking of punishment, on my recent trips to Wrigley Field to watch the Cubs, I note that management, on the mistaken assumption that it is enhancing the entertainment value of the outing, has decided to play thunderous rock music between innings, making conversation about the game and about anything else impossible.)

But the solution of the between-inning and pitching-change commercial breaks that lengthen the time of baseball games is really quite simple. Give me a drum roll here: It's called reading. Keep a magazine or lightish book on your lap during these breaks, as I invariably do, and revert to it during them. You can usually get in a page of reading during commercial breaks, and sometimes even get in a brief paragraph between foul balls during a lengthy, or what these days is called a quality, at bat.

Baseball, like 19th-century novels, has always contained its *longueurs*, or dullish, if sometimes necessary, stretches: the foul balls, the trips by managers and pitching coaches to the mound, and now the camera reviews of challenged umpire calls. It's part of the deal and for most of us not too much to have to put up with in exchange for witnessing a game of great difficulty—as has often been remarked, if a batter gets a hit one of three times at bat, he's thought immensely successful—and impressive subtlety played with astonishing skill. If the game is too slow for you, best perhaps to walk away and to turn instead to wrestling or mixed martial arts or perhaps choose a becalming participatory sport: checkers or tiddlywinks. You won't, I'm fairly sure, be missed. ♦



We're All Bad Guys

Hollywood's dreary, despairing, dumb antihumanism.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

Half a century ago, fashionable young moviemakers looking for new ways to separate themselves from old Hollywood fuddy-duddies—and to *épater la bourgeoisie* even though it was that very *bourgeoisie* they needed to become rich and powerful—sank their teeth into the notions that America and capitalism were pretty awful and played as aggressively with those notions as a pit bull with its jaws clamped on a rubber bone. To be sure, there was a frisson of countercultural excitement to be had from the “this isn’t the land of the free and the home of the brave, it’s a murderous pit of bigotry and consumerism and imperialism” theme. But as time passed, pop-culture anti-Americanism became just another fusty cliché spouted primarily by people who had—in the unintentionally revealing I’ve-passed-my-sell-by-date words of Hillary Clinton—“come from the ’60s, a long time ago.”

So what is a good liberal movie-maker to do these days if he wants to set up a morality play in which the collective villain would in olden days have been considered the hero? The moviemaker has to go further. The moviemaker has to find a bigger, grander, more stunning bad guy. If the villain can no longer be America, it will have to be . . . humanity itself.

The most recent example of this is *mother!*, the lunatic allegory from writer-director Darren Aronofsky starring Jennifer Lawrence and Javier Bardem—a movie that is gripping the way reading a delusional letter written

with no margins by a paranoid schizophrenic can be gripping. In *mother!*, Lawrence and Bardem live together in a house she is fixing up, and she is happy, if a little vague. Then people come and destroy everything.

Lawrence and Bardem are not play-



Javier Bardem and Jennifer Lawrence in *mother!*

ing people. They are Mother Earth and God, and their idyll is shattered when Adam (Ed Harris) and Eve (Michelle Pfeiffer) show up. They act all weird, Eve is mean, and then their sons arrive and one of them kills the other—leaving a mess Jennifer has to clean up! Later, Jennifer gives birth (to Jesus, I guess) just as Javier publishes a successful poem (the Torah, I guess—the timeline’s a little screwy here). Suddenly, hundreds if not thousands of his admirers swarm the house, trash the fixtures, literally tear their baby to shreds, and begin fighting a war in the basement.

“What are you doing?” Jennifer says, over and over again (Aronofsky must simply have cut and pasted the sentence 500 times while he was writing his screenplay, which he did, he says, over a mere five days). Humanity is nothing but a needy, greedy, thieving, careless, monstrous, murderous, teeming, and utterly loathsome force for evil.

Just as the driving impulse behind the explosion of cinematic anti-Americanism in the 1960s was the antiwar movement, antihuman movies have an ideological root: environmentalism. The relentless logic of environmental extremism, according to which the Earth is a pure good being destroyed by the collective evil visited upon it by human beings, also animated Aronofsky’s 2014 *Noah*. In that fascinating and equally bananas movie, the human race’s ecological depredations lead the biblical Noah to seek the extirpation of all mankind, even compelling him to seek the murder of his own grandson.

The most successful movie ever made, 2009’s *Avatar*, is also an environmental fable of a kind: It tells the story of a soldier sent to a distant planet so that the people of Earth can drain its precious resources. It turns out the residents of Pandora are the woki-est woke beings in the universe, literally existing in fiber-optic harmony with the animals and the planet itself (as represented by a really big tree). Our hero is so disgusted by his own kind and so inspired by these others that he literally abandons his humanity and transforms into an alien. *Avatar* asked the audience to root for blue-skinned cartoons against poor actors representing the human race and made \$2.8 billion doing so.

The three new *Planet of the Apes* movies, made over the past six years, tell us to support the poor tortured simians, who only want to live in peace, against the monstrous humans who tortured them and then lost control of the Earth to them. And in the clever 2012 horror comedy *The Cabin in the Woods*, two teenagers disgusted by the efforts of manipulative adults to sacrifice some people to underground gods—because those sacrifices have kept the people on the surface of the planet alive—decide the demons are better than the jerky adults and so assent to the destruction of all human life.

The world would be a beautiful place, *mother!* and these other films argue, if there were no human beings in it. But then who would buy a ticket? ◆

PARAMOUNT PICTURES

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Harvey Weinstein Apologizes for Silence About Harvey Weinstein

Fallen powerhouse regrets failure to speak up about abuse

ROLAND BURSTEN
REPORTING FROM HOLLYWOOD

Disgraced Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein yesterday publicly apologized for not speaking up about Harvey Weinstein's history of sexual harassment of women despite knowing about it for three decades.

"Today I add my voice to those who have confessed their shame at knowing about Harvey Weinstein's disgusting, predatory tactics towards young starlets over many years but who kept quiet," said Mr. Weinstein, dressed in his trademark bathrobe. "His behavior was an open secret. Everybody knew, yet did nothing. I knew. Yet I did nothing."

Mr. Weinstein is the latest in a parade of Hollywood celebrities to denounce Mr. Weinstein, join-

ing such well-known stars as Jane Fonda and Colin Firth.

He said he had been motivated by fear of retaliation and damage to his career. "There are powerful forces who would have killed *Project Runway* had I spoken up," said the confessed sex-addict. "At the time, silence seemed like the right decision. But now I am sick when I think how many young women might have been spared the trauma and humiliation of an encounter with that slobbering reptile Harvey Weinstein had I only said something."

Critics interpreted Mr. Weinstein's statements, which came more than a week after the *New York Times* broke the story about Harvey Weinstein's history of sexual harassment, as a cynical ploy, a Johnny-come-lately effort to be seen to be on the right side of public opinion lest silence betoken indifference to a scandal that has engulfed Hollywood.

But others were more generous. Reached in Europe, Roman Polanski [See Weinstein, Page A7]



HARVEY: JIMI CELESTE / PATRICK MCMILLAN / GETTY

Harvey Weinstein speaks yesterday about his 'inexcusable silence.'